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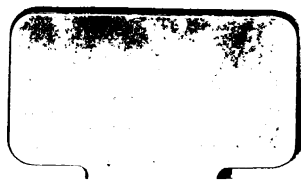
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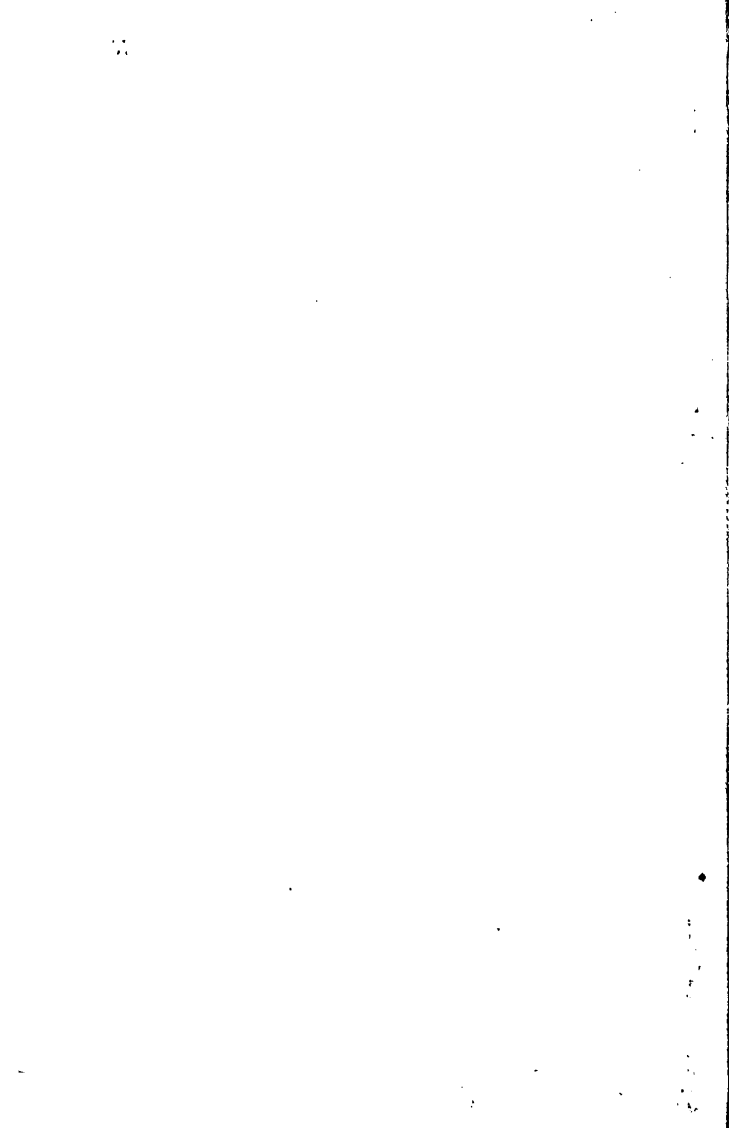
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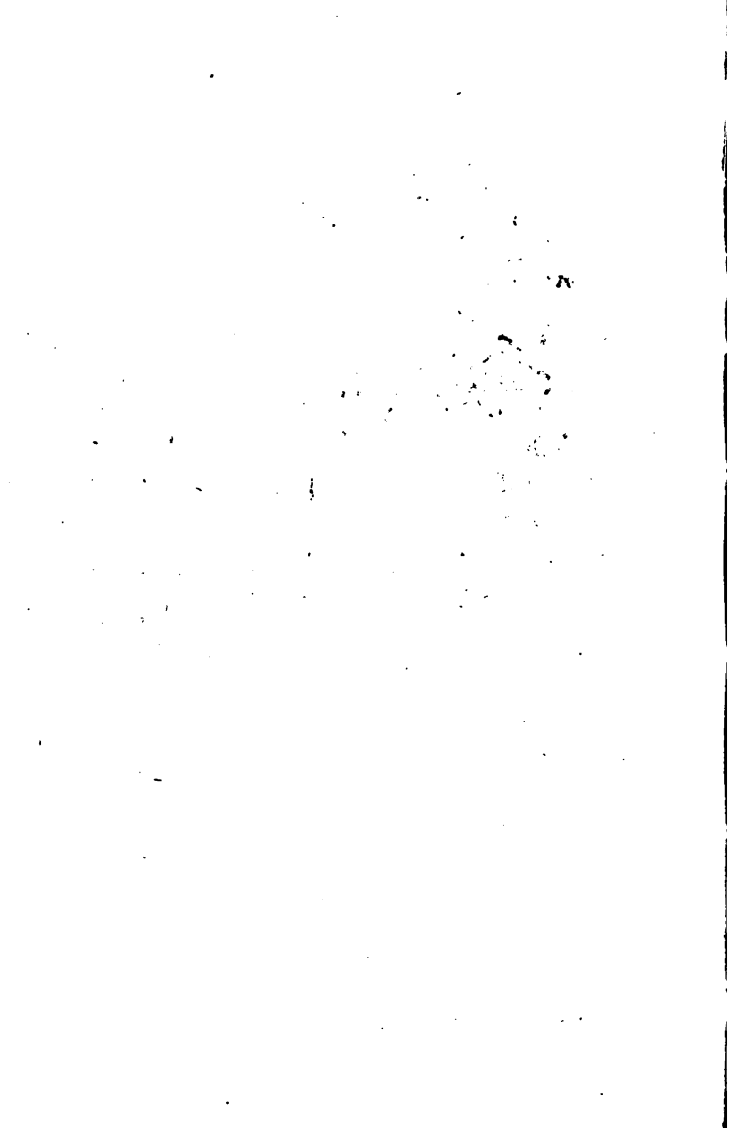
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**UNCLE AMBROSE.**









BROTHER REGINALD'S  
GOLDEN SECRET.

A Tale for the Young.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"HOPE ON," "KING JACK OF HAYLANDS," &c.



LONDON:  
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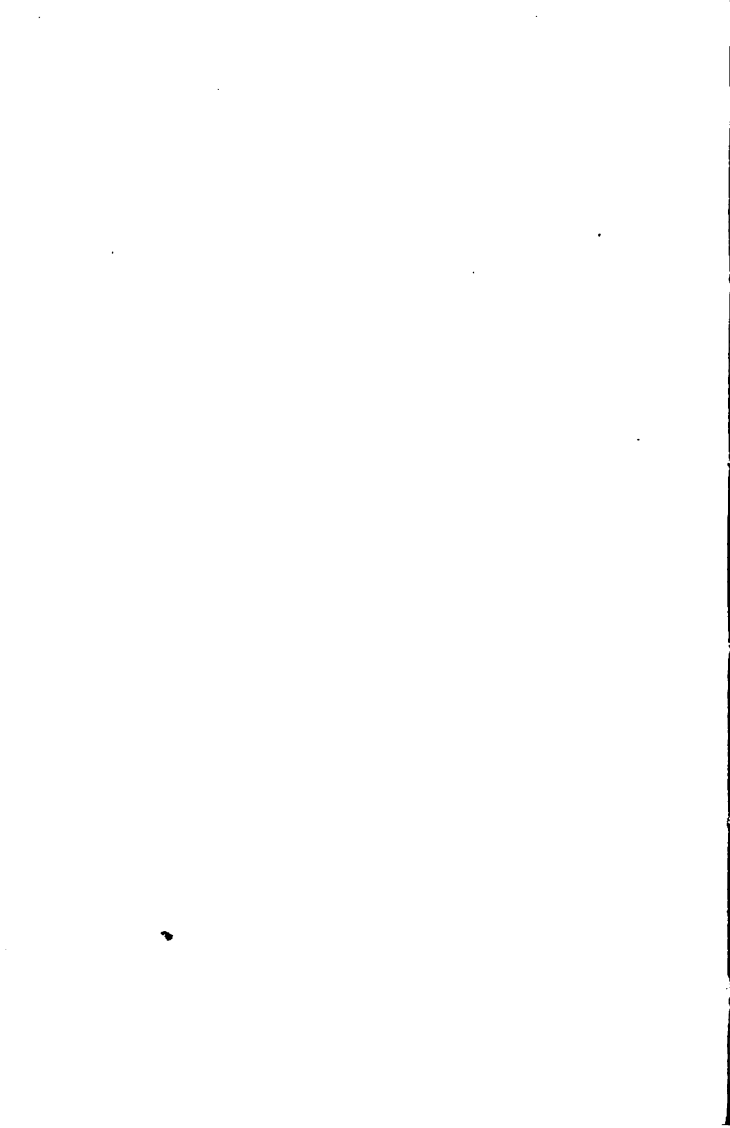
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## REGINALD'S GOLDEN SECRET.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

"He is coming! he is coming!  
To fill his home with glee,  
With his merry ringing voice,  
And his laugh, so light and gay.  
We'll prepare a loving welcome,  
For the boy comes back to-day."



SAY, driver, that's the rectory," said a voice from the inside of the carriage that was driving quickly through the village of Enmore, and a curly head, covered with a Scotch cap, was popped out of the window for a moment.

"All right, young master!" answered the coachman as he turned in at the gate.

Meanwhile Ernest Leslie was getting excited ; he was just approaching his home, and every object was so familiar that he could not be quiet.

“ I declare, they’ve cut down the horse-chestnut ! what a shame ! There’s old Maggie with her red cloak ; she’s been plaguing papa, I’ll engage, for money. No flowers !—too late, I suppose—yes, chrysanthemums, ugly, ragged things. Here we are ! There’s Connie at the door ! All right, driver—bother this window ! ” and then Ernest flung himself out of the fly and up the steps before the driver had time to dismount and ring the bell.

“ That’ll do, Connie—how are you ? Well, papa, here I am. Where’s mamma ? ” and Ernest broke from his sister’s arms and rushed into those of his mother, returning her kiss with most loving warmth.

“ What luggage, my boy ? ” said his father.

“ Black trunk, carpet bag, hat-box, fishing-rod, walking-stick, and an empty bird-





A LOVING WELCOME.

cage with two mouse-traps tied to it—all right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Please, papa, pay the man. I've no change left."

So Mr. Leslie was left to settle with the driver, while Ernest sprang up three steps

at a time with Connie after him, until he reached the drawing-room floor. Then he turned to a door on the right, and entered a pleasant sitting-room. At the first glance we should have thought that no one was in the room, but, on looking more closely, we should have discovered a young man lying on the couch, between the window and the fire-place. Ernest's instinct guided him straight up to the sofa, as he cried,—

“ Well, Reggie, how are you ? ”

“ As well as usual, my dear fellow, and delighted to see you,” answered his brother Reginald, while the bright colour flushed into his pale cheeks, and he eagerly grasped Ernest's two hands.

“ Yes ; isn't it jolly that I'm back again ? ” said Ernest.

Reginald smiled, but answered, in chorus with Constance, who was standing beside him, “ It is—*very*.”

“ No end of fun to tell you—such a supper last night !—and I've brought a letter for

papa—from Dr. Johnstone—such a good boy am I !”

“That entirely depends upon what’s in the letter, old fellow,” said Reginald.

“Of course ; but I know it’s good, for when the doctor shook hands with me, he said, ‘Good-bye, Ernest ; you are your father’s own son.’”

“That was information, certainly,” remarked his brother with his own peculiar smile.

“Bother you, Reggie, you know well enough what I mean ; and I was so proud, I stood two inches higher.”

“When you put your boots on,” said Reginald.

“Without them, you old stupid, just for being my father’s son—the doctor thinks no end of him.”

“Of course he does ; no one who knows him could help doing so.”

“But really, Reggie, how are you ? How does Dr. Stephen say you are getting on ?”

A sad smile passed over his brother's face. "He thinks I shall do, Ernest."

"Yes, but—"

"But what?"

"When are you to walk about again, and leave off using these things?" pointing to some crutches lying beside the sofa. Connie turned round and ran out of the room, and the two brothers were left alone.

"*When, Reggie?*"

His brother's voice sunk to a low whisper, as he answered, "Never!"

Ernest's face changed; the bright colour faded from it, and he burst forth angrily,—  
"The fool, what rubbish it is, just because you've had no one but an old country pettifogger who is cramming you with ever so many lies, and you go and believe them. Reggie, I didn't think you were so green!"

"Don't speak of our good friend like that, Ernest, it is not only him. Papa has had the best advice from London—nothing can

be done for me. I am here for the rest of my life."

"I don't, I won't believe it!" cried Ernest, "they are all—" but the sentence was finished with a sob, for the excitement was too much for him.

"Don't, Ernest, don't," said Reginald, throwing his arm round him, "you pain me."

"O Reggie, Reggie, why didn't they tell me?"

"I asked them not to. I wanted to tell you myself, and I couldn't write it. I am sorry it should just spoil your home-coming; but you must help me to bear it bravely, dear Ernest," and Reginald raised his brother's tearful face, and pushed the dark curly-brown hair off his forehead, looking fondly into his dark eyes as he did so.

"I'll tell you what, Reggie," said Ernest, "I won't believe it; I'll believe that you are going to get well—it's much the jolliest to think that, so I intend to."



REGINALD AND ERNEST.

Reginald shook his head, and then tried to turn the subject. "Did Maurice go home to-day?"

"Yes; Uncle Walter came to fetch him; and, Reggie, there's a letter coming from him to papa,—don't say I told you, it's a secret, and Connie will be so pleased."

"Ernest, my darling, aren't you coming

down to have some dinner?" said his mother, entering the room at that moment.

"I should think so, if it's going, mother."

"I hear it *coming*," said Reginald. "Have you been to the nursery, Ernest? there is a general outcry there for you, and if you don't soon appear I expect there will be a rebellion, and nurse will have to read the riot act."

"That *would* be a pity," said Ernest, merrily, "seeing that the penalty on the rioters used to be weary hours in the corner; it was so, at least, when I was young."

Reginald laughed heartily, and Ernest, seeing that he had made himself rather foolish, hastily quitted the room and found his way to the nursery.

There was a general rush upon him, and very confused sounds reached his ear.

"There's Ernest."

"Ernest, your cat has got two kittens, and one's going to be given away to the little sick boy in the village."

“Ernest, that top you gave me’s broken to bits.”

“Well, Master Ernest, what a big boy you’ve grown.”

“Ernet, ’oo mut tarry me on ’oo bat.”

“How are you, all of you, I’d like to know?” said Ernest; “but *don’t* all speak at once,” and the last words were said in a tone of the most doleful entreaty that set them all laughing directly.

“Master Basil,” cried nurse, “you’ve upset your broth, you naughty boy, I’ll—”

“O Mrs. Wilton, please don’t mention it,” said Ernest; “don’t you see it was in his anxiety to do me welcome?”

A boy of five years, with laughing eyes, and large rosy cheeks, smiled his acquiescence in Ernest’s words, and a little girl of four slipped her hand into his.

“Well, Clara, how do you find yourself this cold weather?” said her brother, lifting her up in his arms.

Clara’s only answer was a merry laugh,  
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and then Ernest went over to the table, where a boy between two and three years of age was seated in a high chair (which he could not possibly wriggle out of without help), and deep in a bowl of broth with bread broken into it.

“ Well, Freddy, are you glad to see me ? ”

“ ‘ Oo muttn’t ’ peak to me, till I done my brot, ” said the little boy, lifting his grave eyes from the bowl.

Ernest laughed. “ When shall I carry you on my back, Fred ? ”

“ When I done my brot. ”

“ Come, Ernest, dinner’s ready ! ” said Constance, putting her head in.

“ All right, so am I. Good-bye, my dears ; take care of yourselves, ” said the school-boy brother, as he closed the door behind him.

“ Well, Ernest, ” said Constance, drawing a deep breath, and surveying him from head to foot.

“ Well, you’ll know me again, ” said Ernest ; but nevertheless he flung his arm round her

neck, for this sister, who was just one year his senior, was very dear to him, and they had never been parted before. Constance stopped with one foot on the stairs and gave him a warm hug. "I've lots to tell you, Con, lots; but I'm hungry."

"Of course you are."

"Come, Ernest, my boy; I haven't seen you yet," said his father, taking him by his shoulders and drawing him to the window as he entered the dining-room. "Hold up your head, lad, and let me have a good look at you."

Ernest did as he was desired, and his truthful eyes were raised to meet his father's keen searching gaze.

"Have you come back my own straightforward, true-hearted boy?"

"Yes, papa."

"As fond of home as when you left it?"

"I believe you."

"Have you begun to learn what it takes to make a *man*?"

"I think so," said the boy earnestly.

Mr. Leslie bent forward and kissed his forehead, whispering, "God bless you, my Ernest!" and then said aloud,—

"Come, and sit down. Well, my boy, how gets on the learning; shall you be fit for Rugby in another year?"

"I hope so, papa."

"Have you got any prizes, Ernest?" asked Constance, eagerly.

"Only the second for French," said Ernest, reddening suddenly, as if some unpleasant remembrance had crossed his mind.

"Not the general knowledge that you were going to try for so hard?"

"No!" said Ernest, impatiently.

"Why not?" asked Constance.

"Because another boy got it;—mother, a little more gravy, if you please. Papa, how is old Mr. Baldwin?"

"The same as ever," said his father.

"Who has taken the red brick house amongst the trees?"

“ A Mr. and Mrs. Dixon.”

“ Do you know them ? ”

“ Very slightly.”

“ O Ernest, such horrid people ! ” exclaimed his sister, “ they look so cross ; they come to church, so I see them ; there’s the master and mistress and a tall ugly girl with straight curls ; and a little fair-haired boy used to come with a terrible cough, but he doesn’t now. Poor little fellow, he used to look so sad, and when the hymns were sung, very often I could see the tears rolling down his cheeks. One day coming out I smiled at him, and he looked so pleased and smiled so brightly and beautifully ; and then Mrs. Dixon seized his hand and said, ‘ Come on, directly ; how dare you smile to people you don’t know ? ’ and she walked on very quickly before I could say one word.”

“ Ernest dear, some more potatoes ? ” said his mother.

“ Dinner was soon over, for the food was not long in vanishing before the hungry boy ;



THE FAIR-HAIRED BOY.

and then he set out on a tour of discovery to see the servants, the horse, the cow, his favourite house-dog, who was chained up in the yard, and the cat and her kittens. The orchard and paddock, the garden and stable, were all visited in turn, and then Ernest challenged his sister to a walk. She soon joined him, and they set off at a brisk pace, as the air was keen and frosty. As they

went through the village, Ernest was continually obliged to stop to speak to his friends there, who all welcomed him home with great delight. But at last they had left Enmore behind them, and were walking quickly in the direction of Willingham, the large market-town which was about three miles from them.

It was one of those days in December when it is a real pleasure to walk. The road lay along a high ridge, overlooking all the valley below, and the distant range of hills beyond were covered with the blue haze which is generally over them at that season of the year. The ground beneath was crisp and hard, the sky above bright and glorious, the hedges red with the hawthorn berries, and the tall green fir-trees stood up looking grave and stately in groups on the side of the hill.

“Isn't it a glorious day ?” said Constance, nestling her hands into her muff.

“Yes ; I say, Connie.”

“ Well ? ” -

“ I know a secret, but I must tell it to you.”

“ Do,” said Constance, her eyes sparkling at the thought.

“ Well, Maurice and I, you know, are great friends ; he was very kind to me when I first went amongst the boys.”

“ He was your cousin, so of course he was.”

“ There’s no of course in the matter, Connie, but he *was*, and I like him very much ; you know Uncle Walter gives him lots of money.”

“ Yes, but that’s not why *you* like him, Ernest.”

“ Not *for* his money, but because he’s so jolly about it. Well now, to the point. Maurice wrote home to tell his father that he wanted me to go back with him to Treverton Hall, and when Uncle Walter came he asked me if papa would let you and me come for Christmas ; they are going to have

such fun. Albert is coming of age, and they are to have loads of people, and something fresh is to be done every day, so that, as Maurice says, they are to have a real merry Christmas. O Con, won't it be fun ? ”

“ Yes, but— ”

“ Well, what ? ”

“ Will papa let us go ? ”

“ Uncle Walter said he felt quite sure he would. ”

“ I am afraid Reggie will be dull. ”

“ Poor Reggie ! I don't think so. Oh, Maurice would be dreadfully disappointed. ”

“ When will the letter come ? ”

“ Perhaps to-morrow. ” There was a long pause, and then Constance said,—

“ Ernest, why didn't you get that prize ? I wanted you to, so much. ”

“ I'll tell you, Connie, only a fellow doesn't like being made a fool of before every one. Well, I did try, I tried harder than I ever tried about anything before,



and I nearly got it ; only a boy that I never thought could get it, a stupid lazy fellow that we all hate, called Arthur Forrester, answered all of a sudden better than me. It was the queerest thing ; we never thought he was trying, and one morning he began to speak up, and every minute afterwards he was poring over his books. Even then all the fellows said I was sure of it ; but Forrester gained ground steadily, and he got it. Some of the boys said he cheated, and I dare say he did, for I think he'd do anything. Fancy, he actually refused to join our cricket club, though I know he had money enough, for I saw him get a post-office order for a pound one day."

"Perhaps he wanted to do something else with his money."

"No, no, Connie ; it was nothing but miserliness, for all he said was, when we looked at his beautiful prize (it was 'Tales of a Grandfather,' bound in green leather and gold—a stunning book), 'I wish it had

been money, but this is better than nothing ;' and Connie, you would have laughed if you had seen the clumsy way he took it from the Doctor ; he tried to bow, but it was more like a Sunday-school child would do it here, and then he let the book tumble, and got just scarlet ; and all the other boys had been cheered, but there was a dead silence as he walked down the room, for no one wanted him to have it."

"Poor boy," said Constance.

"Now, what a shame that is, I do believe you would rather he had it than me, Constance ; I don't think that's very civil of you ; but if you could see him I don't believe you would like him, he's such a stupid-looking fellow, and always holds his head down, and if he's spoken to he starts and says, 'What did you say ? I didn't hear you !' He seems always to be thinking of something else. But, I say, Connie, it's getting late ; we must turn back."

They had nearly reached the village again,



HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

when they heard the sound of wheels coming close to them. It was a shabby-looking gig, and contained a man who was driving

and a boy who sat beside him, with a small trunk strapped on in front. As it passed them, Ernest looked up, and his eyes met those of Arthur Forrester.

He whispered this to Connie, and the boy seeing himself recognized, nodded coldly to Ernest, colouring deeply as he did so, and looking away directly.

“Well, *isn't* that odd? Who would ever have thought of having him in these parts? Now, Connie, doesn't he look a dolt?”

“He looks very cold and miserable, poor fellow; but, Ernest, I couldn't see him long enough to know any more.”

Ernest began to whistle, and Constance watched the gig driving on quickly through the village, and wondered whether those in Arthur's home would be as much delighted at his getting the prize as she should have been had Ernest brought it back with him.






## CHAPTER II.

### ARTHUR'S WELCOME.

"And fall the sounds of mirth  
Sad on thy lonely heart,  
From all the hopes and charms of earth  
Untimely called to part."

HE shabby gig drove on through the whole village and along a piece of the road beyond it, until it turned in at the gates of the red brick house amongst the trees.

Arthur clambered down from the gig and stood on the door-steps. No loving face was there to greet him, no kiss of welcome awaited him.

He opened the hall door and went through the hall itself, until he reached the sitting-room; but there was no pleasure in his face,

no quickness in his step, and he turned the handle as if he knew that he was not wanted inside.

A lady was engaged in darning a quantity of gray stockings by the fire, and a girl was playing a very noisy waltz on the piano.

Arthur walked up to the fire-place. "How do you do, Aunt Dixon?"



AUNT DIXON.

"Quite well, thank you, Arthur. I hope you are the same?"

"Yes, thank you ; how d'ye do, Charlotte?"

The girl who was playing stopped, and extended two fingers to him.

"You are too late for dinner, Arthur. I suppose you can wait until tea-time?"

"Yes, aunt; how is my brother?"

"His cough is still rather bad, but not so bad as he makes it out; we have coddled him too much, haven't we, Charlotte?"

"Yes, we have indeed, and get no thanks for it."

Arthur bit his lip, and stretched out his hands towards the fire. "May I go up to him? where is he?"

"In your room; yes, you may go; but you mustn't be surprised if you find him fretful, it's his illness makes him so."

Arthur did not wait any longer, but bounded up the stairs until he got to the top of the house, when he softly opened the door of one of the rooms. The floor was only partially carpeted, and looked dreary and comfortless; two small iron bedsteads stood side by side; there were a few chairs,

a deal table, a painted chest of drawers, and a small fire blazing in the grate. A few pictures were hung round the walls, which looked damp and cold, and some books were ranged on the top of the drawers. This was Arthur's room, and Arthur's brother was painting at the table. He did not hear the footstep near him and went on with his occupation, only pausing when his cough stopped him, and Arthur started when he heard it—it was so deep and hollow.

“Herbie!” and he laid his hand on the little boy's shoulder. He turned quickly, and flung his arms round Arthur's neck with a joyful cry.

“Arthur, my own dear Arthur, oh, I'm so glad!” and Herbie clung to him as if he would never let him go again.

“So am I, Herbie; but hold up your head, and let me look at you.”

Herbie raised his head—his face was pale, except for a burning red spot on each cheek, his large brown eyes were very bright, his



features all looked as if they were cut in marble, and his hair had a golden light over it, which made him look like a picture, Arthur thought.

“How are you, Herbie?” he whispered.

“Quite happy now that you are come; but how cold you are! poor Arthur, come and warm yourself;” and the little boy drew him to the fire, and began to chafe his hands, and Arthur noticed how thin he had grown, and how poorly he was clad; but Herbie was all delight now that he had got his brother with him, and so even the poor despised Arthur Forrester had a welcome, that first day of the holidays.

“Did they give you some dinner, Arthur?”

“No; I’m to wait until tea-time.”

“I thought so,” said Herbie, springing to his feet, and his face beamed with pleasure as he went over to the cupboard near the window and took a plate out of it and a knife and fork.

"Now, Arthur dear, here's your dinner ; I put it by that I might give it to you my own self."

Arthur was very hungry, and looked with much satisfaction at the slices of meat, the cold potatoes, and the piece of bread.

"You shan't have it cold," said Herbie ; "we'll put the potatoes to crisp between the bars, and I'll broil your meat ; there, sit down on this chair, and I'll clear for action."

Arthur saw how much pleasure it gave his little brother to make all these preparations for him, so he did not prevent him.

"What have you been painting, Herbie ?" he said, going over to the table.

"Nothing but a little picture out of my head ; 'The Dog's Watch,' I was going to call it."

Arthur took it up ; it was a pretty picture, and skilfully done for so young an artist. There was a shepherd's dog guarding his master's coat, a simple rustic scene, painted

with very inferior colours, but still bearing marks of genius and talent.

"It's very good, Herbie; your colour is rather washy here, and not strong enough just there, but still it is very good. I shall get quite afraid of you soon."

Herbert's cheeks glowed with pleasure at his brother's praise, and he said,—

"That's the table you sent me the money to buy, Arthur, I don't know what I should have done without it; but when aunt saw it she was very angry, and said she was glad to see we had so much money to waste; and I know she wasn't glad at all, for I heard her scolding Simon for getting it for me."

"Don't you ever go down-stairs, Herbie?"

"Sometimes," said Herbert, avoiding the question.

"I've brought you something that you'll like, I think," said his brother. "Guess what it is."

"I know what I should have liked you

best to bring me," said Herbert, looking brightly round from the fire.

"Well, what?"

"A prize."

"And I've got it," said Arthur, his whole face lighting up with delight; and going to the chair over which he had thrown his great-coat, he drew a parcel from one of the pockets. "I kept it here that I might get it directly; look, Herbie!" and he undid the paper.

Herbie eagerly watched him, and seized upon the book with proud delight. If Constance had seen his face, she would have been quite satisfied that the prize was appreciated.

"Arthur, Arthur, what a beautiful book! I'm so glad; oh, how pleased *they* would have been!"

Arthur's eyes filled with tears, and he turned away.

"O Arthur, dear Arthur, don't cry. I'm sorry I said that, I'm always saying stupid things."



THE PRIZE.

“No, no, Herbie, boy, it's only that I can't bear it. I couldn't thank the Doctor

when I got it, because I was thinking how joyful it would have been if I could have brought it home to them, and it was horrible to think there was no one to care whether I got it."

"O Arthur, *no* one to care?" and Herbert raised his eyes reproachfully.

"Well, you, of course; but not *them*. Herbie, I got it for you, I worked for it for you, I've written your name in it under my own."

"Arthur—my name! *mine!*—but I cannot take your prize. No; let me <sup>look</sup> at it and read it, and be proud of it; but you must have it for your own."

"No, I tell you I got it for you; I shall have nothing to give you at Christmas, so this must do. I only wish it was money instead."

"Well, then, I'll have it, and love it always, you dear old Arthur, and I shall have a Christmas box for you; but I won't tell you what. There, the meat is hot, and everything is ready."

Arthur was not long in disposing of his dinner, while Herbie watched him with the greatest satisfaction.

"How did they come to let you have my dinner ready for me up here, Herbie?" he said as he finished it.

Herbert coloured.

"Herbie," said Arthur, gravely, "was that your own dinner that you kept for me?"

"Don't be angry, Arthur; I wasn't hungry, and I knew you would be, and so I coaxed Simon not to take my plate away."

Arthur did not answer, but only looked straight before him into the fire. "Come and sit down here by the fire with me, Herbie," he said, after a few minutes.

The little boy came and knelt down beside him, and Arthur put his arm round him. They had nothing else in the world to love except each other, these two poor orphan boys; but nevertheless their affection was quite as deep and true as that of

,

those whose homes were happy, and whose lives had in them none of the bitterness which had been crowded into the few short years of Arthur and Herbert Forrester.

Their parents were both dead, and the boys were left dependent on their mother's step-sister, Mrs. Dixon. Their only other relative was an old uncle of their father's, who had been very kind to him in his youth, and had settled to make him his heir ; but when he found his nephew determined to become a clergyman instead of entering his mercantile house, he had given him up, and said that he would never see him again. Arthur and Herbert had never seen this old gentleman, and did not know where he lived, so that on the death of their father they were left entirely friendless. Mrs. Dixon was written to by several people upon the duty of befriending her orphan nephews, and as she had a great eye to appearances, she wrote to offer them a home in her house ; but having done this, she thought that she



had done all that was necessary on her part, and she felt the two boys a great incumbrance, and made herself appear as a martyr on their behalf. Dr. Johnstone, being an old friend of their father's, wrote to Mrs. Dixon offering to educate the eldest boy for nothing for his father's sake ; so Arthur went to school, and Mrs. Dixon allowed herself to have the credit of sending him. But to return to our story. The evening was quite dark by this time, and the two boys drew as close to the fire as they could.

"Herbie, how bad your cough is," said Arthur.

"Yes," answered the little fellow wearily, laying his head down on Arthur's shoulder.

"Have you seen a doctor, Herbie?"

"Yes, a brother of Mr. Dixon's was staying here, and he heard me cough, and told aunt that I must keep in one room until it was well, and that there must be a good fire kept up. He was very kind, Arthur, and bought me all my drawing-paper, and

gave me two shillings' worth of stamps that I might write to you."

"What a good man!" said Arthur.

"He was; O Arthur—" and the little boy's head sunk down again, and he burst into tears.

"Herbie, what's the matter? tell me."

"Nothing, nothing; I didn't mean to cry, only I thought you'd never, never come back, the days seemed so long, and I was so tired."

"And so you cry now that you have got me," said Arthur, laughing. "Why, Herbie, man, I'd better run away again."

Herbie's arm tightened round his neck. "Oh, if you do, Arthur, I'll run with you; I can't live here without you."

"But, Herbie, you know I've only got holidays until the middle of January, and then we shall have to part again."

"Perhaps before that," said Herbie, doubtfully.

"Why?" said Arthur, starting.

"Only that—don't be vexed, Arthur—only that sometimes I think I shall soon be with papa and mamma."

"And leave *me*, Herbie; oh, nonsense, no, that shall not be, it cannot; you aren't well now, but when the bright spring-time comes you'll be well again."

"Perhaps so," said Herbie, quietly. "Arthur, there's that horrid bell, and you must go down to tea."

"Yes; but I'll come up early."

And when he had left the room little Herbie knelt down and thanked God for bringing his brother back to him.





### CHAPTER III.

#### UNCLE WALTER'S INVITATION.

“Things will be vexing, people will provoke,  
And all goes wrong ;  
Then comes the cry for help, or else the shame  
That frets you all day long.”



ERE are the letters !” cried Ernest the next morning at breakfast-time, as he ran in with the post-bag, which had just been deposited on the hall table. “Quick, papa, do open it !”

“Why, Ernest, what makes you in such a state of excitement? who would have thought of seeing you care about the letters ?”

Ernest looked over at Constance and laughed, and then they both watched their

father very eagerly, while he with great deliberation drew out the little key and fitted it to the lock.

"Well, Ernest, here's one for you, and two for me, and a note for Constance; that's all."

"And quite enough too," said Ernest to himself, for he had caught a glance of Uncle Walter's handwriting on one of his father's, and his own letter was from Maurice Treverton; it ran as follows,—

"MY DEAR ERNEST,

"We arrived here quite safely an hour or two ago. Of course everybody arrives safe everywhere. I don't believe in railway accidents. We have had our dinners, and now to say what I've got to say. Papa is just writing to Uncle Leslie about you know what; and you *must* both come. I want to see Constance too, and so does Katharine; and you and I'll have such fun. I've told Barton that I won't shoot anything till you come, and there'll be first-rate skating if the weather keeps up, and there's to be a ball, and charades, and fun without end—something to take away the taste of all that Greek and Latin, my boy.

"Yours until you come,

"MAURICE TREVERTON."

"P. S.—You should have seen the concern that was waiting for that dolt Forrester at Willingham Station, it certainly was in keeping with his general appearance. I *hope* he'll have a merry Christmas, but what a wet blanket he would be on any fun!"

Ernest looked anxiously over to his father, who was intent on his own two letters.

"Well, papa?" said the boy, after watching him for a few minutes.

"Well, my dear Ernest?"

"You've heard from Uncle Walter, haven't you?"

"Yes, my boy;" and Mr. Leslie folded up the letter, and put it back in the envelope.

"And mayn't we go, papa?"

Mr. Leslie did not answer, but looking over to his wife, said, "My old friend Mr. Barnett is coming to spend Christmas with us."

"Is he, poor old gentleman; I'm glad of it," said Mrs. Leslie.

Ernest looked at Constance dismayed.

"Please, papa, Uncle Walter?"

"Uncle Walter is quite well, thank you, my boy."

"But mayn't we go to Treverton Hall?" said Constance eagerly.

"No, my dear."

Ernest's colour began to rise, he bent his head over his plate, and tears gathered in his eyes; but he would not look up until they were gone, and then he said angrily,—

"Papa, what a shame—we *must* go!"

"That's as I think, Ernest; you had better finish your breakfast."

"I won't have any more," said Ernest, impatiently pushing his plate away from him, and looking out of the window.

Mr. Leslie finished his own in silence, and then rose. "Ernest, will you and Constance come with me to my study?"

They followed him directly; and Mr. Leslie, after poking his fire, and settling

the books on his table, turned round, and put his hand on Ernest's shoulder.



IN THE STUDY.

“Do you want very much to go to Treverton Hall, my boy?”

“Yes, papa.”

“Why, my dear Ernest?”



"Because they're going to have *such* fun, a real merry Christmas!"

Mr. Leslie smiled. "Is it *necessary* that you should leave home to have a real merry Christmas?"

Ernest looked down rather ashamed.

"Answer me, Ernest."

"They are going to keep it up in real old England fashion; there are to be all manner of things done, papa."

Mr. Leslie looked gravely into his son's face. "Ernest, my boy, I am very sorry."

"O papa, you will let us go, say you will, *do*."

"Do, papa," pleaded Constance.

"I cannot, my children."

"Why not?" said Ernest passionately.

"For several reasons; your mother and I want to have all our children with us at Christmas, both for our own sakes and poor Reggie's."

"That's not your only reason, papa."

"No, dear, I did not say it was. I

would rather also for *your own* sakes that you should spend Christmas here."

Ernest stamped his foot impatiently.

Mr. Leslie looked grieved, he was sorry for the disappointment he was inflicting on his children, but more sorry to see the angry feelings it called forth.

None of them spoke for a few minutes, then Constance slipped her arm round his neck, and said, most entreatingly, "Please papa, let us go, just for this once."

"No, love, I cannot," he answered gravely.

"Oh, do," said Ernest, determined to make one more effort.

"I have said 'No,' my boy ; do not press me any more, for I cannot change."

"It's a horrid shame, and you just do it to provoke me," cried Ernest, and he ran out of the room, banging the door behind him.

Mr. Leslie put his hand over his face, and stood leaning against the mantle-piece in deep thought. Constance brushed away

the tears which were running down her cheeks, and tried to keep down the disappointment which swelled in her heart. At last Mr. Leslie spoke, holding out his hand, and drawing her close to him as he did so—

“Do you also think me so unkind, my little Connie?”

“No, papa; Ernest was disappointed, he did not mean what he said.”

“Don’t you believe that I love you too well to deny you anything that might be good for you?”

“Yes, papa,” said Constance, with a great effort.

“I want you to learn, dearest child, what is the true use of this Christmas season.”

A little half-checked sob burst from Constance, at the thought of all the delights of Treverton Hall which they must give up, and her father stooped down and kissed her.

“I cannot bear to disappoint you, my child.”

"I know that, papa," she answered gently.

"God bless you, my own dear Constance ; now run away and try to make Ernest think of it as you do."

Ernest had carried all his anger directly to Reginald, who was always ready to help him in his troubles. Reginald heard him out patiently while he told of all the pleasures they had lost, and descanted on what he considered his father's unkindness ; and when he had fairly exhausted himself, his brother said quietly,—

"You told me yesterday that you were proud of being called your father's son, Ernest."

Ernest did not answer.

"Can you not trust our father's love, Ernest ?"

"I don't know," grumbled the boy.

Reginald sighed deeply.

"What is it, Reggie ?"

"I'll tell you what I was thinking of,

dear Ernest. You know that my one great wish in life has been to become my father's curate here ; I have prepared myself for it, and looked forward to it with the greatest delight. I was nearly old enough to be ordained, you know, when my accident happened, and now it is my heavenly Father's will that I should lie here for the rest of my life ; do you think, Ernest, that I could bear this trouble if it was sent to me in anger—if I did not know that I could trust my Father's love ?” Reginald paused, it was very seldom that he spoke of his own trouble, and his whole face was working with deep emotion.

“ O Reggie—don't, don't,” said Ernest.

“ No, Ernest, I will point you to a higher example than mine. There is One who says that he came into this world, not to do His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him. Who was that ?”

“ Our Saviour,” said Ernest, who was beginning to feel that he was wrong.

At that moment Constance came in. She went over to Ernest directly, and said,—

“I am so sorry.”

“You don’t care about it half as much as I do,” said Ernest, sulkily.

“No, because I don’t know Maurice as well ; but I am very sorry.”

“No merry Christmas for us,” said Ernest, mournfully.

Reginald smiled. “Don’t say that quite so rashly, Ernest ; I know a secret by which you could spend a merrier Christmas here than you would have had at Treverton.”

“Nonsense !” said Ernest, while Constance opened her eyes wide with astonishment.

“I do indeed.”

“What is it ?” said Ernest.

“Oh, I’m not going to tell you for nothing, this precious, golden secret of mine.”

“Oh, do tell us, Reggie !” and Ernest looked quite brightened up.

"No, no," said Reginald, shaking his head; "if I tell you, you shall pay me."

"I want all my money for Christmas boxes," said Ernest.

"Well, I won't ask for money, but if you'll do for me the work that I should do if I was about, I'll tell you the secret the first thing on Christmas morning, and I think that you'll have 'a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.'"

"All right—shake hands on it," said Ernest; "it's a done bargain."

"When shall we begin?" said Constance.

"This afternoon," said her brother; "and now, in preparation for it, I advise both of you to set off for a walk while this glorious sunshine lasts."

"We will," said Ernest; "it's no good fretting about Treverton any more, and I won't; all the same, it's a horrid bore; and if you don't do something wonderful for us, Reggie, I'll never forgive you."

Constance had gone to put on her things,

and Reginald called Ernest back for a moment.

"Won't you make it up with papa before you go out?"

"Yes," said Ernest; and in another minute he was in his father's study, and without hesitation went up to him and said, "Forgive me, papa, I was in a rage, I spoke wrongly."

"All right, my boy, I am quite ready to forgive and forget it. I see you spoke truly, Ernest, when you said that you were learning to be a man, for true manhood will never fail to acknowledge itself in the wrong."

"We are going out for a walk now, papa."

"That's right."

Constance was ready by this time, so they set out; and the subject of their speculation during the walk was Reginald's Golden Secret.






## CHAPTER IV.

"WHO WAS THE ARTIST?"

"The simple are the wise to Him,  
The gentle are the brave,  
The weak the strongest, if they put  
Their trust in Him to save."



"BEFORE we go back, Ernest, would you mind coming to the house at the corner of the village street? I want to ask how poor Miss Matheson is," said Constance, as they were returning home.

"Isn't that your governess that comes every day?"

"Yes; but I got a note from her this morning saying that she was not at all well."

"All right—we'll go, only you mustn't stop long."

"Only five minutes," said Constance.

"Oh, I know what your five minutes mean, Connie!"

"Well, it shall really be only five this time."

"Isn't this the house?"

"Yes;" and Constance knocked at the door.

"Can I see Miss Matheson?"

"I'll go and see," said the woman who opened it; and in a moment or two she returned, begging that they would walk upstairs.

It was a very homely room that they were shown into, and yet there was a certain degree of taste displayed in the arrangement of its furniture. Books lay on the table, and a white chrysanthemum was flowering in a pot on a small stand in the window. A few good prints and one or two water-colour paintings hung on the walls.

The governess soon entered, pale and care-

worn, with deep shadows under her eyes, telling of pain and suffering.



THE GOVERNESS.

"How kind of you to come, Constance," she said gently; "and is this the brother whom you were expecting home?"

"Yes, Miss Matheson, this is Ernest; but I came to know how you were; I am sorry you have got that troublesome headache again."

"It is very bad to-day, dear; but I dare say I shall be well to-morrow; and if you will let me, I will make up my time then with a couple of extra hours."

"No, no! mamma has sent me with a message to you, to say that my holidays may begin from to-day, instead of next week, as Christmas is coming on so fast."

A sorrowful shade passed over the face of the governess as Constance said these words, and the brother and sister both noticed it.

"How glad you must be when Christmas comes, Miss Matheson," said Ernest.

"I ought to be, but I fear I am not this year," she replied sadly.

"Why not?" asked Constance.

"It will be a very lonely time to me, dear."

"Will it?—won't you go home?"

"This is my home, Constance; I have no other."

"But you have a brother, won't he come and spend it with you?"

Miss Matheson's eyes filled with tears as she shook her head in answer.

"No, dear Constance; I heard from him this morning, and he says he cannot come."

"Won't his employers let him?" said Constance, sympathizingly, for she knew that he was clerk in the bank of a large town in the north.

Miss Matheson coloured, and hesitated for a moment, but then said firmly, "It is not that, Constance; he could get leave, but he cannot afford to come, nor can I."

Constance was sorry that she had pressed the question, and changed the conversation by taking up a water-colour picture that lay on the table.

"How pretty this is, Miss Matheson! look, Ernest."

"The First Ride!" said her brother, reading the name on the back. "Yes, that is a pretty picture, uncommonly so; how well the little chap sticks on!"

The scene represented the stable-yard of

an old manor-house ; on the steps of a door which opened into it a lady was standing, shading her eyes with her hands while she watched her little son, a boy of about four years old, mounted on a shaggy pony, and held on by an old serving-man, who was leading the animal carefully round the yard, while a large Newfoundland dog followed at his heels. The squire was leaning against the wall with his arms folded, smiling at his little son's delight ; and a little girl by his side was clapping her hands with glee, as she watched her brother's progress.

“What a jolly dog that is !” said Ernest.

“Yes, and I like the pony too ; I think it is something like Mr. Baldwin's old pony—and how pretty the little boy's merry face and golden curls look, in contrast with the old servant's gray locks and wrinkled forehead. O Miss Matheson, did you do this ?”

“No, dear, I didn't. I am glad you like the painting, it has a strange history.”

“What is it ?” said Ernest.

"Will it make your head worse to tell us?" inquired Constance, more thoughtfully.

"No. You know I teach Elise Talbot and her sister Jane; well, some time ago, they showed me a little painting done by one of their brothers, representing this scene, and I asked them to lend it to me, and they did. It lay in my drawer for several weeks, and I thought no more about it, until one day last summer—I remember it was very hot—I was sitting by the open window, when there came a knock at my door, and presently a boy of about fourteen was shown in. He seemed very shy and nervous when I asked him what he wanted, and at last he said that he had come to ask me to tell him something about painting, that he knew that I taught it, and he should be so thankful if I would give him some hints about it. I willingly said that I would, though I thought it rather an odd request; and then he opened a portfolio, and produced several pictures of his own; they were wonderfully done, and



MISS MATHESON'S VISITOR.

I felt that the boy was a genius, and, with some training, would become a famous artist.



I began to help him as well as I could, and, in turning over my drawer to get out some copies, I came upon this little sketch: he was delighted with it, and begged the loan of it. When he was going away, I asked his name; but he refused to tell it, begging me not to insist upon it, and so I never found it out. I liked the boy, though there was something very miserable in his face, and so I promised not to ask anything more, and I lent him a paint-box which I was not using, and then he went off, very thankful and content."

"He might have been a cheat, Miss Matheson," said Ernest, shrewdly.

"So I began to think after I had done it, but this morning proved my suspicions false, for he brought back my box, and all the copies, together with this picture; he looked if anything more sad than when he was here before, and said he should be so thankful if I could sell his pictures for him in any of the families where I went

to teach, adding that he would take for them anything I could get. His other little sketches are in this portfolio," she continued, opening one which lay near her.

"Oh, that's good!" said Ernest, taking up one of a large St. Bernard dog finding a traveller in the snow. "Constance, wouldn't Reggie like that?"

"I'm sure he would—it's beautiful."

"How much should I pay for it?"

"Well, say seven and sixpence; would that do?" said Miss Matheson.

"Yes, I could give that!" said Ernest, thinking with no small pleasure of the sovereign Uncle Walter had slipped into his hand at parting.

"Ernest, we've been here much more than five minutes; come along," said Constance; "I'm sure we're doing no good to Miss Matheson's head."

"You have not made it worse, dear; I am always glad to see you. Will you thank your mamma from me for the arrangement

she has made; and I hope you will both have a very happy Christmas."

"Thank you," said Constance; "but we don't know what to do that it may be a merry Christmas—we don't know how to amuse ourselves."

"I do not think that, to any one who remembers the true Christmas blessing, it can fail to be a *happy* time, whether it is *merry* or not," said Miss Matheson gravely, as she said good-bye to them.

When they got home, Ernest put his picture away safely; but while doing so he made a discovery, for in minute letters in one corner he found the initials A. E. F.

Meanwhile, in the top room of the red house amongst the fir-trees, Arthur Forrester was sitting on his little brother's bed, for Herbie's cough had become worse during the night, and he was so exhausted in the morning that he could not get up.

"Well, Herbie, you'll soon have something warmer, I think. Isn't it fine?"



ARTHUR AND HIS BROTHER.

"Yes, Arthur ; but you must not work so hard for me. I know you were up too early this morning, mounting that picture, and it was so cold."

"Nonsense, Herbie, man."

"What made you think of going to her, Arthur ?"

"Because I saw her with Charlotte, and knew how kind she was."

"Oh, here's Aunt Dixon, Arthur ; what will she say to find me in bed ?"

There was a hand upon the lock of the door, and then Mrs. Dixon entered.

"Herbert, not up? are these the goings on up-stairs out of my sight—pray, sir, when do you expect the servants are to make your bed?"

"He was very ill this morning, and I told you so," said Arthur fiercely.

"He is no worse than he was before you came home; and if this kind of thing is to occur, I shall separate you."

Herbie shuddered, and got down as far under the bedclothes as he could.

"It is a very weakening thing to lie in bed," continued his aunt; "you will get up directly, Herbert."

"Yes, aunt."

"And, Arthur, that is much too large a fire; it is not such a very cold day;" and Mrs. Dixon began taking the topmost coals off with the tongs, adding, in a freezing tone, "when you pay for the coals you will be welcome to waste them, but while *I* give

them to you, I expect that you will be more economical."

Arthur clenched his hands tightly, and would have broken out into a passion had it not been for a look from Herbie.

Mrs. Dixon was taking a survey of the room meanwhile. "You must not hammer nails into the wall, it marks it. I won't have it done, boys."

"Very well, aunt," said Herbie.

"I'll do it if I choose," muttered Arthur.

"And, Arthur, I won't have you always up here, it's bad for Herbert; you must come down-stairs."

"O aunt, please—" cried little Herbie earnestly.

"Be quiet, Herbert, and don't dare to speak in that fretful tone. I really am shocked to see a little boy who has so much kindness shown towards him so peevish and irritable," and then she left the room.

Arthur looked after her for one moment

when she had closed the door, and then threw himself down by Herbie with a bitter cry.

"Don't Arthur, don't. I don't mind it. I wish you wouldn't cry so."

"O Herbie, I cannot bear it for you; if it was only me I shouldn't mind, but for mamma's baby-boy, as she used to call you. Herbie, I hate that woman!"

Herbie put his fingers on his lips.

"I do, I do!" cried Arthur. "I hate every one but you, Herbie."

"No, you don't; you like Miss Matheson, and you like Dr. Johnstone, and old Simon, and that good Mr. Henry Dixon who was so kind to me."

Arthur gave some kind of a mumbled assent, but still continued muttering to himself, "I do hate her."

Herbie turned his flushed face round on the pillow, and at last he said, "Arthur, would you mind—I haven't said my prayers this morning, would you say them for me, while you kneel there?"

"What shall I say?"

"The one mamma taught me first of all."

"Yes;" and Arthur repeated it, though his voice trembled exceedingly.

"Now the Lord's Prayer, please," but Arthur's voice nearly broke down when he said, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." There was a long pause, and then Herbie whispered,—

"Arthur, say something for Aunt Dixon."

"I can't, Herbie."

"Yes, do, please."

"If I did it would be, 'Please put an end to her,'" he replied, lifting his head with a bitter smile on his lips.

"No, no, Arthur, not that."

Arthur buried his face in the clothes again, and neither of them spoke for a few moments, until Herbie said, hesitatingly,—

"Arthur, it's getting on for Christmas time, and then don't you know there is to be 'peace on earth, good-will toward men.'



Have we got 'peace and good-will to Aunt Dixon?"

"No."

Then Herbie clasped his hands, and said, in a low soft voice, "Pray God make us forgive her, and make her a little bit more kind, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. Now, Arthur, I will get up, and will you help me to dress?"

With as much tenderness as a gentle nurse could have used, Arthur helped his little brother, and when he had done he said, "I suppose I must go down to dinner now; Herbie, what will you do?"

"I can't paint to-day, Arthur; I will sit in my little chair by the fire, and read your prize."

Arthur's face brightened, and he drew the little wicker-chair, which had been his parting present to Herbie when he was going to school, close to the fire, and seated him in it.

"Are you all snug?"

"Yes;" and Herbie looked up at him with a bright sunny smile, which made Arthur leave him with a lighter heart. He did not know that, when he was gone, large tears began to roll down the little fellow's face, and dimmed his eyes so that he was unable to read. He was very weary of the pain and suffering of his daily life.






## CHAPTER V.

### HOW TO SPREAD THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE.

"Thus may the bitter cold and the trying weather of a biting snowy Christmas be read. Surely it calls aloud to every one, that *now* is the moment for clothing the naked, for feeding the hungry, and for comforting the afflicted."—*Parables from Nature.*

ELL, Reggie, what have we got to do for you?" said Constance, as she and Ernest came into their brother's room after dinner.

"It's snowing, so we can't go out!" said Ernest.

"No, I know you can't, so will you work for me here?"

They both gave a willing assent.

"How bitterly cold it is," said Reginald.

"Ernest, boy, poke the fire, will you?"

"Mrs. Wilton and Basil went to bring the kitten to Jamie White this morning, and he had got no fire, Reggie; just think of that."

"I have been thinking of it, dear Connie, and so I have asked papa to let me give an extra grant of coal; and I want Ernest to write me some coal tickets in his best round hand. I wish we had a great deal more money to spend on them. Our own bright Christmas fires and warm comforts always make me think sorrowfully and with pity of those who can only dread this season, from the want and privation it brings to them."

"Yes, I remember Giles Young telling papa the other day that he wished Christmas-time never came."

Reginald sighed. "I suppose we have no idea what the poor suffer from cold," he said thoughtfully.

"This is an unusually cold winter," said Ernest.

"Yes, but that does not make it easier to bear."

"Certainly not."

"What am I to do, Reggie?" asked Connie.

"Will you go and ask Mrs. Wilton to give you one of the little warm frocks she has cut out this morning, and will you begin to make it? I will read you a story."

Thus the afternoon passed pleasantly away, and when twilight came on, and they could no longer see their work, Ernest and Constance came and seated themselves close to the fire by Reggie's side.

"To-morrow is Sunday, and on Monday would you mind taking round these tickets?" he asked.

"We'll be proud and happy," laughed Ernest.

"Reggie, while you've been reading an idea came into my head."

"Well, what is it?"

"What fun it would be to go and try to make old Baldwin stand something for creature comforts for the poor around him. He's

such an old miser, I know, he never gives anything to anybody."

Reginald smiled. "Then I don't think he would give anything to you."

"It would be a good joke to try; besides, I've a curiosity to see the inside of his house; will you come, Connie?"

"Yes," said Connie. "O Reggie, I do wish *every one* could have a merry Christmas."

Reginald laid his hand softly on her glossy hair. "Constance," he said earnestly, "will you do your best that it shall be so?"

"O Reggie, I can't; what can I do—I'm only thirteen, and Ernest is only twelve—what can we do to cure all the cold, the want, and the misery you have been telling us of?"

Reginald answered,—

" 'Wherever in the world I am,  
In whatsoe'er estate,  
I have a fellowship with hearts  
To keep and cultivate,  
And a work of lowly love to do  
For the Lord on whom I wait.' "

You know how fond I am of those lines, Connie."

"Yes, but, Reggie, what *could* we do?"

"Well, you have done something this afternoon; and on Monday you are going to give away the coal-tickets, and try to move Mr. Baldwin's feelings."

"I believe he freezes up his heart when the winter comes," said Ernest.

"Then you must try to thaw it," said Reginald, merrily.

"Yes, I will."

"And when you go into the cottages, will you not have a famous opportunity of giving away kind words and good hearty Christmas wishes; and can you not watch to see if there is any little thing you can do to leave a ray of Christmas sunshine behind you?"

"Oh yes," said Connie; "there might be some poor little boy or girl who would like a warm frock, or whom we could lend a picture-book to."

"Or some old woman to be comforted in her rheumatics," said Ernest, slyly.

"Yes, I begin to see some things we could do; and then there will be our own Christmas boxes, and the little ones, and our school-treat coming on: I only wish that horrid old Mr. Barnett wasn't coming; but never mind, Ernest, we'll have some fun."

"To be sure we will," said Reginald; "and I've been thinking that we might perhaps have some fun for the little ones."

"Oh, capital," said Ernest, who was not at all above this kind of thing; "and there'll be the putting up of the holly in the church."

"And let us remember," said Reginald, "in all we do, that Christmas is to remind us of something higher than our own pleasure; He who came down into this dark dreary world from His home of light, came to bring 'peace on earth, good-will toward men;' let us each try how far we can send the Christmas message, and how many



hearts and homes we can brighten with it, for His sake."

"Why, Reggie, you talk like a book," said Ernest, springing to his feet.

"Well, it is not often I speak to you like that, Ernest, so you must mind me all the more when I do," replied his brother.

"Well, I'm off for a romp in the nursery," cried Ernest.

"And I must go to mamma," said Connie; so Reginald was left alone.

He lay quietly for some minutes watching the snow-flakes falling on the trees outside the window, which could be only dimly seen through the gathering darkness; and as he watched, mournful thoughts filled his mind. "Yes," he said to himself, "*they* can work, *they* can do something for Him; but I must lie here a useless log, *I* who would have worked so hard; oh, it is hard, it is hard, I should not mind if I were not so useless; but it is God's will, and I must not rebel. I must ask to be taught how to bear it

patiently, for the worst part of my trial is to feel that I am an idler in His vineyard."

Was Reginald Leslie a real idler? I think not. On his couch of suffering he was doing his Master's work quite as effectually as if he had been employed actively; his "strength was to sit still," and unconsciously he was the mainspring on which much machinery was revolving that would otherwise have been still.

The next day was Sunday, always a peaceful and happy time in Enmore Rectory. There was no cold formality, no undue severity in the way it was kept, which made it repulsive. Every one felt that it was in reality the day of rest ordained by God; and a spirit of repose and peace brooded over the house on its Sabbath. Even Ernest felt the difference between its observance at home and at school, where it was so difficult amongst all the boys to "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" and he privately told Constance

that it "didn't require any goodness to keep Sunday at home, but that it must be a saint who could do so at school." One surprise both the children had, when they went to church, and that was seeing Arthur Forrester in the Dixons' pew, looking as dogged and sullen as ever; and Ernest declared it was too bad to see him, for it was not at all pleasant to be reminded of the loss of his prize on the first Sunday of the holidays, by seeing his successful rival sitting just before him.

Reginald had been told all about the disappointment; and Ernest's wrath was greatly raised when, on returning from morning service, and telling Reggie about his seeing Arthur with the Dixons, his brother said quietly,—

"Poor fellow! why, Ernest, you might find him out, and bring him over here; who knows but we might brighten his Christmas a little?"

"Thank you, I would rather not," said

Ernest, contemptuously. "I've seen quite enough of him."

Reginald looked up sorrowfully, and Constance said quickly, "Perhaps that poor little boy with the bad cough is his brother."

"I should think so, it's most likely," said Reginald; but Ernest walked out of the room.

"Connie, I don't like Ernest to keep up angry feelings against that poor boy; I dare say he leads an unhappy life with the Dixons. I should think he was an orphan from what you tell me of the deep black crape round his hat; and we might be kind to him."

"What can we do?" said Constance eagerly.

"Well, I think I will write him a note tomorrow when you are out, and ask him to come over and see me; shall I?"

"Oh, do, Reggie, that would be capital; and you find out all about him and the other little boy."

“I will try;” and a feeling of pleasure stole into Reginald’s heart as he thought, “Perhaps to bring some Christmas happiness to those poor children is to be my work; I will not repine any more.”





## CHAPTER VI.

### REGINALD'S WORK.

"Poor indeed thou must be, if around thee  
Thou no ray of light and joy can'st throw;  
If no silken cord of love hath bound thee  
To some little world through weal or woe."



ARTHUR was painting the next morning up in his room, when old Simon the servant, who looked with a kindly eye upon the friendless boys, opened the door and put his head in.

"Master Arthur, here be a note, and be there any answer?"

"A note for me! Oh, surely not, Simon!"

"Yes, large as life, 'Master Arthur Forrester, Fir-tree Lodge;' bean't that you, sir?"



## A NOTE FOR ARTHUR.

“I suppose it must be,” said Arthur, taking it, while Herbie watched him with wistful eyes. It ran as follows,—

“Mr. Reginald Leslie would be glad to see Master Arthur Forrester this afternoon at the rectory, at three o’clock, if it would be convenient to him to come. Mr. R. Leslie is unable to leave his sofa, so he hopes Master Forrester will excuse his want of ceremony.”

“How strange!” said Arthur. “I won-

der if that is Ernest Leslie's brother, and what he can want with me! However, Herbie, don't you think I had better go? he might become a friend, and help us away from this hateful place."

"Yes, Arthur, do go," said Herbie instantly.

"Very well, Simon, say I'll be there."

Simon nodded and went off with his message, leaving the two boys not a little astonished.

"I wonder if Ernest has been talking about me."

"I should think so," was Herbie's reply.

"But then I can't understand this gentleman wanting to see me, for Ernest would say nothing good of me, that is very certain."

"He couldn't say anything bad, *I'm* sure," said little Herbie, looking proudly into his brother's face.

"Nonsense, Herbie; every one does not look at me through rose-coloured spectacles



as you do, silly fellow. Ernest Leslie hates me, because I got that prize, and he wanted it."

"I am very glad he didn't get it," said Herbie.

"So am I. I never thought about getting it till that day when I got your letter saying how proud you'd be if I got one, and then I set to work and got it for you—I've half a mind not to go to see this gentleman."

"You've said you will, and so you must now," said Herbie; "and perhaps he'll be a friend and help us, Arthur; who knows?"

So Arthur did go, and found himself on the steps of the rectory just as the church clock was chiming the hour of three. He was shown up into Reginald's room directly, and he certainly had not expected the kind reception which awaited him.

Reginald was lying on the sofa, but he held out his hand very kindly to welcome Arthur, and asked him to take a chair near him, adding,—

"As I am the clergyman's son and Ernest's brother, I thought you would not mind my asking you to come and see me. I have so few visitors, and the sight of a new face is such a pleasure to me, in my unbroken confinement up here."

Arthur coloured and stammered out something, he knew not what.

"You are living with the Dixons, are you not?" said Reginald.

"Yes."

"Are they any relations to you?"

"Mrs. Dixon is my aunt."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"One brother;" and from the bright look which accompanied the words, Reginald knew that he had touched one chord of his heart.

"I suppose your friends were very much pleased that you got the prize. Ernest told me how well you answered."

A bitter smile crossed Arthur's lips as he replied, "I have got no friends."

Reginald looked at him searchingly ; there was something in that pale face, dogged and sullen as it was, which interested him strangely—there was so much sorrow, anxiety, want, and privation written in it, which ill accorded with the lithe boyish figure ; and yet, at the same time, the high, well-formed forehead betokened such concentrated purposes, calm determination and firmness, and the gray eyes were so clear and truthful, that Reginald felt that the boy was not what Ernest had depicted him, and that some sad history lay behind the sullen exterior.

“ Surely your aunt was pleased with your prize ? ” he went on.

“ I didn't show it to her.”

“ May I ask you why not ? or is it an impertinent question for a stranger ? ”

“ No ; I was afraid she would keep it to put on her drawing-room table, instead of letting Herbie have it, and I got it for him.”

"Oh, I see," said Reginald. "How cold it is now; do you skate?"

"No."

"Don't you like it?"

"I don't care about it."

"I used to be very fond of it, until I met with my accident, and now you see I am completely prevented from doing anything of the kind."

"Are you very dull?" said Arthur; and then thinking, from seeing a smile cross Reginald's face, that he had said something very foolish, he coloured more furiously than ever. But Reginald said directly,—

"Oh no, I have plenty to do. I read a great deal, and sometimes I write."

Then there ensued a long and pleasant conversation on books and lessons, in the course of which Reginald made out a great deal of Arthur's mind, which was no ordinary one, and after a while he skilfully turned the subject back to Arthur himself and his little brother.

"I am afraid from what my sister tells me that your brother is ill."

"Indeed he is," said Arthur; "so ill that it frightens me to see him. I think the house we are living in is too damp and cold for him."

"Very likely," replied Reginald; "could you not write to some of your other friends or relations and tell them so."

"We have no others," said Arthur mournfully,—“we are quite alone in the world, Herbie and I, and if—if he dies I shall have no one."

"Poor fellow," said Reginald, "yours is indeed a sad story."

Arthur rose and said abruptly, "I must go now, Herbie will be watching for me."

"Would you mind taking him some of the oranges that are lying on that plate—from me?"

"Thank you," and Arthur took up one.

"Please give me the plate," said Reginald, stretching out his hand for it; and

when Arthur gave it to him, he began to fill all the boy's pockets with the fruit.

"There now, you can carry those, can't you?"

"Yes; but don't let me take them all."

"Please do, and come soon to see me again. I know we shall be famous friends."

"You're very kind," said Arthur, holding out his hand to say good-bye, and then Reginald rang the bell, and Arthur descended the stairs.

It was twilight, so that Ernest and Constance, who were ascending the steps just as he was leaving the house, did not recognize him, and he walked quickly towards his home. The tea-bell was ringing as he entered Fir-tree Lodge—for he called at Miss Matheson's on his way and found the seven and sixpence waiting for him; to his great delight; and never was any boy prouder of his first earnings than Arthur Forrester as he carried them home to Herbert that evening: but a great check was

put upon his pleasure by his aunt's wrath as he entered the house.

"Pray, Master Arthur, may I inquire where you have been this afternoon?" was her first question.

"I have been to the rectory, aunt."

"And what business had you to go there?"

"I went on my own business," replied Arthur carelessly, as he seated himself at the table.

"Mr. Dixon, may I request your opinion on Arthur's conduct?" said Mrs. Dixon in a cold and measured tone. "I tell Arthur that I wish him to do something for me this afternoon, and, instead of obeying me, he steals off to the rectory, without saying one word to me, and comes back after dark."

"Well, my dear, I don't suppose he'll get any harm at the rectory."

Mrs. Dixon's face grew more wrathful as she answered, "It is well that it cannot last much longer. How are we to know that he

has been to the rectory at all? he is quite deceitful enough to bring that forward as an excuse."

Arthur's face flushed crimson, and he sprang to his feet. "How dare you say that I tell a lie? How *can* you even think such a thing of one of my father's sons?"

Charlotte began to titter, as she always did when Arthur was angry; and Mrs. Dixon's manner became more freezingly cold and sneering.

"Compose yourself, Arthur; I know nothing of your father except through his children, and I cannot say that they present a very charming result of his training."

Arthur was trembling with rage, and could hardly find words to express it, when Charlotte said suddenly,—

"Arthur, what makes your pocket stick out like that?"

"What's that to you?" he replied.

"What have you got in it?" said Mrs. Dixon.



Arthur did not reply.

"Speak directly, Arthur, and answer your aunt," said Mr. Dixon, looking at him across the table.

"I don't see why I should," muttered the boy, stooping down to pick up his handkerchief, which he had dropped; but as he did so one of the oranges fell from his pocket and rolled across the floor straight to Mrs. Dixon's feet. She took it up and placed it on the table.

"There, Mr. Dixon, that is all the confirmation we want of the falsehood he has told—he has been in the village buying these."

"Have you, Arthur?" said her husband.

"No," replied Arthur proudly.

"Have you been anywhere else, besides to the rectory?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I don't choose to tell."

"Answer directly, when *I* tell you," said Mrs. Dixon.

"And who are *you* that I should answer *you*?" asked Arthur, looking her straight in the face.

"One to whom you owe everything," said Mrs. Dixon.

A bitter laugh was Arthur's only reply.

"How dare you, sir, mock at your aunt?" said Mr. Dixon, rising; and coming round the table he boxed his ears.

Arthur made a wild spring at him, but suddenly checked himself and sat down again.

"Give me those oranges—I won't have them taken up-stairs," said Mrs. Dixon.

He rolled them across the table to her.

"Now, young master, go straight off to your bed," said his uncle, taking him by the shoulders and pushing him out of the room.

Arthur sprang up the stairs and was soon in his own room. Herbie was watching for him with a joyful face.

"Well, Arthur, was it nice?—how long you've been; have you had tea?"

But Arthur did not answer, he only threw himself on to a chair near the fire, and covered his face with his hands.

"Arthur, Arthur!—what is it?—has any one been hurting you?" said the little boy lovingly, as he crept to his brother's side.

"Nothing," muttered Arthur.

"Please tell me. I know something has vexed you."

"*Do* leave me alone," said Arthur angrily.

Herbie shrunk away directly. Arthur had never spoken roughly to him since their father's death, and the poor little boy felt that if his brother began to be cross with him now the finishing stroke would be put to his troubles.

He sat down quietly and was silent, and Arthur went on looking moodily into the fire. About ten minutes passed, and then Arthur said suddenly,—

"Herbie."

"Well?"

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"I've been a brute to you ; come here."

Herbie went to him and knelt down beside him.

"Make it up, Herbie?"

"Of course," said the little boy, squeezing his hand.

"Do you care to hear what put me out?"

"Yes."

So Arthur told him all about it.

Herbert was quite silent when he had done, only he held his brother's hand very tightly and laid his head down on it.

"Well, Herbie?"

"Arthur, I think it's very hard that I should have such a quiet life up here while you are worried and tormented down-stairs."

"I'm stronger than you, Herbie."

"I wish—but no. I won't say it."

"But why not ; I don't mind what you say to me?"

"I wish you hadn't said all that to Aunt Dixon."

"So do I now ; but she aggravated me so."

"Couldn't you tell her you are sorry?"

"I'll see about it, Herbie. I say, little man, would you mind it very much if I was missing some fine day?"

"O Arthur!" and Herbie looked into his face to see how much he meant of what he was saying.

"Do you think I don't mean it?" said Arthur.

"I *know* you don't," said Herbie; "it's the only thing that helps us on, that we are together. Arthur, promise you won't go away until you are obliged to go to school, oh, promise," and he clung round his neck.

"Yes, Herbie, but you mustn't be like a girl about it. No, silly boy, I won't leave you; and I'll get some money by my pictures."

The next morning when Arthur went down to breakfast he walked straight up to his aunt, and said,—

"I am sorry if I was rude to you last night."

Mrs. Dixon looked at him for a moment, and then said, in her most icy and constrained tone,—

“I am glad to hear it; but it is too late now.”

Arthur could not understand why these words sent such a cold shiver through him, but he was soon to know.

After breakfast his uncle told him that he wanted him at ten o'clock in the library. Arthur's heart beat very fast as the hour approached, and as the clock struck he entered the room.

Mr. Dixon was seated at the table. Mrs. Dixon was standing by the fire, drawn up to her full height, and looking a complete iceberg.

“Arthur,” said Mr. Dixon, taking off his spectacles, and rubbing them, “*I* think—that is to say, your aunt thinks—I mean, we both think—that it's high time you should do something for yourself. I was at work long before I was your age.”



## STARTLING NEWS.

“Yes, sir,” said Arthur, while his heart beat faster, and his whole frame trembled.

“Well, I’m glad you agree with me ; so I hope you will be pleased at the news I am about to tell you.”

Arthur leaned against a chair which was near him and waited for his uncle to go on.

"We think that if you were to have some employment, Herbie might take your place at school—I have written to Dr. Johnstone about it—and he is growing up so ignorant that it will be a good thing for him."

"He is not strong enough for school," faltered Arthur.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Mrs. Dixon.

"Well, Arthur, to come back to the point. A brother of mine is the captain of a merchantman, and he has been good enough to offer to take you in his vessel as an apprentice without any premium."

Arthur's face got paler than ever, and his hands tightened their grasp on the chair.

"I hope you will prosper, and get on in the profession we have chosen for you."

Arthur had a great dislike to a seafaring life, his mind longed for something higher; and the banishment from Herbert seemed terrible.

"When am I to go?" he asked in a low and smothered voice.



“ Well, we thought it was best not to lose such a good opportunity, and so—”

Mr. Dixon was not naturally a hard-hearted man, and he could not bear to watch the look of pain that was gradually stealing over Arthur's ashy face ; but Mrs. Dixon had no such feelings, and she said harshly,—

“ You go on the 29th of December, Arthur, so you may as well make up your mind to it. If you had behaved yourself properly, and shown a respectful gratitude for all the kindness we have heaped upon you, we should not have thought these measures necessary.”

“ When did you say I was to go ?” said Arthur, looking up suddenly, and speaking in a hard forced voice.

“ On the 29th,” said Mr. Dixon.

“ Is that all you want to tell me ?” said the boy again, passing his hand across his forehead.

“ That's all ; you may go now.”

He turned, and left the room. Slowly

he ascended the stairs until he reached his own. He opened the door and went in, shut it quietly behind him, and walked over to Herbie's side. There was a miserable attempt at a smile on his lips as he said,—

“Herbie, I'm to go to sea on the 29th of this month.”


Herbie turned round with an incredulous look, which quickly changed to one of alarm, as he saw that Arthur's lips grew deadly white, his eyes closed, and he fell on the ground insensible. Quick as thought Herbie ran out of the room and called Simon, whom he heard on the stairs below. In another minute the old man had lifted the fainting boy from the floor, and placed him on his bed, while he used every means for his restoration; and soon Herbie had the joy of seeing him open his eyes and hold out his hand to him; and the little fellow sprang joyfully to his side.



## CHAPTER VII.

"GOOD-WILL TOWARD MEN."

"The heaven we pray for would be here  
If each would bravely do his part,  
To crown with joy one cheerless home,  
To crown with love one human heart."



ERNEST and Constance went to Reginald's room as soon as they returned from their expedition, and they were both most anxious to tell about its result.

Their brother was quite as anxious to hear, and the only difficulty was, who was to be chief speaker.

"I tell you how we'll do it," said Ernest. "Connie shall tell all about the old women, while I roast these chestnuts, and then I'll tell you about old Baldwin."

"Very well," said Reginald, "that will be capital. Now, Connie, clear your throat and begin."

Connie burst out laughing. "Why, Reggie, that's the very way to make me do it badly."

"Well, I'm waiting," said Reginald; "please do not keep me in suspense any longer."

"Well, we went first to Mrs. Green's, and we found her very grumbling and miserable."

"She had rheumatics terrible bad in her shoulders," put in Ernest.

"Yes, and so she said a great deal about people who had plenty of warm clothing on their backs not knowing what it was to want and to shiver and shake with the cold; and she said that she hadn't anything to keep her warm. And then we gave her your ticket, and she said, 'Bless the young gentleman; but coal don't keep the shoulders warm, and it's there I've got rheu-

matics.' And then Ernest tried to make her understand that if her room was warm, her shoulders would be warm too ; but he was laughing so much that he could hardly speak to her."

"I wasn't, Connie ; I'm sure I talked like an old grandmother."

"Go on, Connie," said Reginald ; "we must try if Nannie Green can't have a warm shawl. I'm sure mamma would like her to."

"Oh, that'll be beautiful ! Well, Reggie, then we walked on a little and we met old Stephen, so we stopped and said, 'How d'ye do, Stephen ; how are you ?' and he answered just like he always does, 'I be well and hearty, miss, thank the Lord,' and he laughed his own peculiar laugh. I do like to see him, he always seems so happy, and one never hears him grumble. I asked him if he had plenty coal, and so he answered, 'Well, miss, we haven't much, but it's enough for us ; we don't burn fire in the evening.'



OLD STEPHEN.

" 'But then isn't it cold, Stephen?' I said. 'Bless you, miss, we don't feel it, because, ye see, we go to bed.' Then Ernest said, 'Isn't it famous Christmas weather, Stephen?' and he said—what was it Ernest? you'll tell it best."

"He said, 'It be indeed, Master Ernest; and I thank the Lord that He's letting me see another Christmas. It's nigh fourscore

that I've seen, and I may truly say, that I love each one better than the last,'—and then what was it, Connie?"

"Oh, you know we asked him why, and he answered, 'Because, ye see, my dears, each year that I knows Him, I loves my Saviour better, and I be the more thankful that He came down to this world, to live and die for we poor sinful folk.' And then we told him that you had sent him a ticket for coal, and he said he was 'most truly thankful, and that as the nice blaze warmed him and his old woman, he'd pray God to bless you, and make your Christmas a happy one;' and then he gave us plenty of good wishes, and we went on."

"The dear old man," said Reginald; "we'll ask papa to let us have some roast beef and plum-pudding for him and his wife on Christmas day."

"Yes, yes, we will," said Connie; "well, Reggie, then we went to see Jamie White: poor little boy, he was so weak and ill, but

his face brightened up when we talked to him, and Ernest promised him a book with pictures in it, about animals; and then when we were going away, Jamie said, 'Please, master, there be one thing I want very bad,' and what do you think it was?"

"Probably something to keep him warm," said Reginald.

"No; much queerer than that. 'Please, I do want a bit of Christmas to put up here. Last year I had plenty, because I could go out and get it; but I haven't got none this time, and it don't seem *like* Christmas without a bit of holly and red berries.'"

"So, Reggie, I'm going to cut him a lot, and make his room quite pretty on Thursday," said Ernest.

"That's famous."

"Well, Reggie, then we went to old Mrs. Coles, and then to Giles Young, and then to little Eliza Cookson, and all the rest, and they were all so thankful to you, and spoke



to us so civilly ; but some of the cottages were very cold and comfortless."

"They are indeed, Connie dear ; but still you and Ernest have done your best to warm them to-day."

"Or rather, *you* have," said Connie. "Now, Ernest, are your chestnuts done?"

"Yes, some of them ; here, catch. There, you goosie, you've burnt your fingers. Now, Reggie, for our adventures in the lion's den."

"Well, we rang at the bell of his large, empty, dreary-looking house, and were shown into his parlour. The old gentleman was sitting over a roaring fire, with the table drawn up close to it, and a tankard of ale and a pipe lying before him on it. The floor had an oil-cloth on it."

"On which we nearly tumbled down," put in Connie.

"And to add to the dreary look of everything, there were some large, cold-looking shells put in a stiff row along the mantle-

piece. Well, we shook hands with Mr. Baldwin, and then Connie said, 'How cold it is to-day!' and he said gruffly, 'Come nearer the fire then.' And then she laughed, and said, 'Oh, I'm not cold, but Ernest and I have been visiting some of the poor people who have got no fires;' and then the old man frowned, and I thought he'd like it better if we dashed into it right away; so I said, 'We've come to ask you for some money to make them warmer, Mr. Baldwin, because it's Christmas time;' and directly I had said it, he buttoned his coat across, as much as to say, 'There now, my pockets are safe;' but all he really said was, 'Well, and what's Christmas to me?' And so I said 'that it was a jolly time to all of us;' but he mumbled something about 'he couldn't see it;' and then I left the game to Connie, because I thought perhaps she could come the pathetic to him; and so she said, 'Why, Mr. Baldwin, papa says, and Reginald my brother says, that it's a time for showing

good-will toward men ; and so we thought making them a little warm and comfortable would be showing them good-will ;' but all he said was, ' I don't see what it is to you what I do, so long as you show good-will yourself.' "

" O Ernest," interrupted Connie, " you forget that he said, ' Pray, where are we told to do that specially at Christmas?' and I said the verse to him—I *did*, Reggie. I never was so frightened in my life ; but somehow it seemed to come into my mind to do it, and he only shrugged his shoulders and frowned harder than ever ; and then Ernest said it was beginning to snow, so we went away, and that was all the good that came of it ; but Ernest said as we were going off, just as we passed under the window, ' What an old screw !' I hope he did not hear."

" Well, did you ever hear of such a close-fisted old fellow ?" said Ernest.

" It's very sad," said Reginald, " very sad



"A CLOSE-FISTED OLD FELLOW."

indeed. I hope none of us will ever be the same."

"I'm sure Ernest won't," said Connie, "for he isn't one bit selfish, and he thinks of things so much quicker than I do! Just fancy, Reggie, at dinner to-day he put by his pudding to take to Jamie White.—By-the-by, Ernest, why didn't you take it with you?"

Ernest coloured deeply, but his brother and sister could not see it.

"You see, Reggie," continued Constance, "I had nearly eaten mine when Ernest put his away, so I could not do it—I was so sorry—and all I could do was to bring him my orange from dessert. You can send your pudding back when White goes to the post-office, can't you, Ernest?"

"No," said Ernest, in a very humble tone; "I don't want you and Reggie to think me a better boy than I am; so I must tell you that when you were putting on your things I saw the pudding on the parlour side-board, and it looked so good, I couldn't help it. I just set to work and ate it up. There now, Reggie; what do you think of me?"

"I'm sorry, Ernest, that you were not stronger. It was easy enough to make the resolution when you had made a hearty dinner before; but when a little time had passed, and you began to be hungry again, you had not courage to keep it," said

Reginald, as gravely as he could ; and Constance was sorry that she had brought up the subject, and changed it by asking if Reggie knew who the boy was whom they met on the doorsteps.

"It was Arthur Forrester," replied her brother, watching to see the effect his words would have upon Ernest ; "and now, Connie dear, would you mind going to fetch Fred down to see me ? he hasn't been down at all to-day."

Constance went off directly, and Ernest exclaimed wonderingly,—

"Reggie, what brought that fellow here ?"

"I sent for him."

"O Reggie, when he got the prize from me !"

Reginald took Ernest's hand.

"Is that any sufficient reason, Ernest, why I should dislike an orphan boy who leads a very sad life, and has but little to cheer him ?"

Ernest did not answer.

"Ernest, will you mind if I speak very plainly to you? This is Christmas time, and we keep this season in remembrance of Him who reconciled the world unto God by taking upon Him a human form; it is a time of reconciliation, dear Ernest, of 'good-will toward men.'"

"Yes, Reggie."

"Well, then, do you not think Christ says to us at this time, 'A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another?'"

"Yes, Reggie."

"And do you think you can have a truly happy Christmas, if you do not forgive Arthur the wrong you seem to think he has done you, though for my own part I think you are unjust, for surely Arthur had as good a right to try for the prize as you had?"

"Well, now, I never thought of that; I

suppose he had ; but, Reggie, he is such a dolt."

"I did not find him so," said Reginald. "I liked him very much. Now, Ernest, supposing you were to go and see him to-morrow."

"I will," said Ernest heartily ; "I will, Reggie, for the sake of Christmas 'good-will.'"

"There's a good fellow,—and here's Freddy."

Constance came in at this moment with Freddy in her arms. He was Reggie's god-son, and a great delight to the poor invalid.

"Strike a light, Ernest, please. Come, Freddy, my man."

"'Eggie, me dot somfin' for 'oo," said the little boy, tossing back his golden curls, which nurse had been arranging with much care before sending him down.

"What is it, little one?"

"A 'Kismas pesent," and Freddy's eyes



sparkled with pleasure at the look of surprise Reggie assumed.

"What is it, then?"

"O Reggie!" exclaimed Constance, "the children have been to the village shop this afternoon to get their presents, and there's such mysterious work up in the nursery; and Basil and Clara have told each other what they are going to give, and told me and told nurse; but we are all to look surprised on Christmas morning, and Freddy is most anxious to give his to you now."

"Well, Freddy, where is it?"

"*Dere!*" said Freddy triumphantly, and he held out a large pink sugared almond to Reggie.

"Oh, thank you, Freddy; how good; here, give me a kiss."

The little rosy lips were stretched out to him, but Freddy's eyes were fixed wistfully on the almond.

"Well, now, am I to eat it?" said Reggie.

"No, no!" said Freddy very emphatically.

"Why not? am I to keep it?"

"No!"

"Well, then, what is to be done with it?"

"*Me* eat it!" cried Freddy, joyfully.

Reggie laughed at his amicable arrangement; but then, holding up the sugar-plum, he said, "Well, then—

'Open your mouth, and shut your eyes,  
And in your mouth you'll find a prize.'"

Freddy ate it with great satisfaction, and then, patting Reginald's cheek with his little soft hand, he said coaxingly,—

"Did 'oo like 'oo 'Kismas pesent, 'Eggie?"

His words were greeted with a merry peal of laughter from Ernest and Constance, but Reginald turned round upon them a very grave face, though a smile lurked round the corners of his mouth, as he said,—

"'Let not those who live in glass houses dare to throw stones.' Ernest, who got the pudding?"



## CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE CAME TO SILAS BALDWIN.

“Glory to God in highest strains,  
In highest worlds be paid ;  
His glory by our lips proclaimed,  
And by our lives displayed.”



**M**R. BALDWIN was a rich farmer, who lived alone in the dreary-looking house which Ernest had described. It was quite true he was miserly—not by nature, but by habit: his youth had been full of struggles, and his manhood had been saddened by severe trials, and now that he was surrounded with wealth, he did not know what use to make of it, and became close and niggardly. He had but one living relation, and that was his daughter, who had married without his con-

sent, and whom he had consequently cast off. She was a widow, very much straitened in circumstances, and having a large family to support; but though she had written several letters entreating her father's forgiveness, he would not grant it, and they remained estranged. This had somewhat embittered the old man's heart, and he was inclined to look with a cold and unsympathizing eye upon those around, while he remained wrapped up in his own sorrow. He heard Ernest's exclamation as he passed under the window, and it went like a dagger through him.

“ ‘Old screw’ can it be? am I come to this?—well, it is the fault of those who have made me so—pooh! what does it signify what a boy says of me?” and the farmer lighted his pipe, and puffed away in silence. The winter wind whistled keenly round the walls of the old house, the snow was falling, it was very cold, and he drew his chair a little closer to the fire, while most unplea-

santly there kept ringing in his ears the words of the children who had just left him, "Peace on earth, good-will toward men." "Why does Christmas come?" he muttered, "it's a bore;" and then the old man's mind wandered back into past Christmas times, when he had had his wife by his side, his children playing by his knee; ah! Christmas was no "bore" then. "Pooh!" he exclaimed impatiently, "why should I think of that; my wife and two sons are dead—my daughter worse than dead to me,"—and then, spite of himself, his thoughts flitted further back still to the time when he had dragged the Yule log into his father's yard, and helped to set it on fire; when he had watched, with wistful eyes, his mother's preparations for the Christmas feast; when he had walked through the snow with her to the little village church, and exchanged friendly greetings with the neighbours, and listened with delight while Rose Stanley's sweet childish voice joined in the glad Christmas hymn—

pretty Rose Stanley, who was afterwards his wife—and suddenly there sounded upon the farmer's ear the very words he was thinking of ; for voices outside the window were singing—

“ Hark ! the herald-angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King,  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled ; ”

and, as he listened, tears rolled down the old man's cheeks—it seemed like a voice from his childhood—but how changed was he now ? The carol went on, and at last the farmer heard the last verse—

“ Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace !  
Hail, the Son of Righteousness !  
Light and life to all he brings,  
Risen with healing in his wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
Born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth.  
Hark ! the herald-angels sing,  
Glory to the new-born King.”

Silas Baldwin rose and went to the window, flung it open and looked out. There

stood the little carol singers, four of the village boys, with the snow falling upon them until they looked more like snow men than anything else. They expected harsh



THE LITTLE CAROL SINGERS.

words from the old miser, but they got none ; he only threw them a shower of half-pence, and told them to go off. Then he went back to his fire-side in deep thought.

“ ‘ Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled, ’ ”

he said to himself. “ But I have been for-

getting Him ; can the message be meant for me ? ” and then, like an answer, there seemed to come into his mind the words—

“ Light and life to *all* He brings,  
Risen with healing in His wings.”

Yes, the Christmas message had come to Silas Baldwin.

Long and earnestly he knelt in prayer, and before he went to bed that night, he did two things. One was to take his pen and write a letter containing these words :—

“ MY DEAR DAUGHTER,

“ It is Christmas—a time of peace and goodwill. Come down to me, and bring all your children, and brighten the old house. I shall expect you on Thursday, and the past shall be all forgiven and forgotten.—I am,

“ Ever your affectionate father,

“ SILAS BALDWIN.”

The other was to open his old-fashioned desk, unfasten its secret drawer, and take from thence a five-pound note. This he put



into an envelope, writing on the inside these words, "A token of good-will from 'the old screw!'" and directing it to Master Ernest Leslie.





## CHAPTER IX.

### UNCLE AMBROSE.

"Thou must not let thy heart grow cold,  
Nor hush each generous tone,  
Nor veil the bright love in thine eye,—  
Thou must not *live alone*."

"**E**RNEST, Mr. Barnett has come," said Constance, meeting him in the hall the next day as he returned from a morning of skating.

"Well, Connie, what is he like?"

"A funny, little, wizened-up old man, with spectacles and a brown wig."

Ernest laughed, and Connie went on, "He says every instant, 'Yes, yes, yes; to be sure,' and then coughs."

"O Connie, don't, or I shall laugh when I speak to him."

“Well, you must do that now, for papa has sent me for you.”

Ernest hung his skates up in the hall, and followed Connie into the drawing-room.

“Come here, my boy,” said Mr. Leslie. “This is my second son, Mr. Barnett.”

“Second son!—why, who’s the first?—oh, that poor lad up-stairs—yes, yes, to be sure—I forgot—I must go and see him. So this is the second; well, what’s your name.”

“Ernest, sir.”

“*Ernest*; a very good name too—I hope you *are* earnest?”

Ernest laughed.

“He’s something like Constance there: Leslie, I say, will you let your children call me uncle. There’s none to do it now, and it feels lonely enough.”

“I shall feel truly pleased to do it; do you hear, Ernest?”

“Uncle what?” said Ernest, hardly able to control his merriment.

“Ambrose, my boy ; Ambrose Barnett is my name.”

“Now, Ernest, run off and tell Reginald that we are coming up to see him,” said his father, and Ernest was not sorry to comply. He had a great deal to tell Reginald, for he had been to see Arthur that morning, and his brother was waiting anxiously to know the result of the visit.

“Well, Reggie, you see it was an old man that came to the door, and he showed me up-stairs, and I went to Arthur’s own room, and saw him and Herbie. Arthur seemed rather confused, and so did the little one, and both of them looked like ghosts, and seemed very miserable, and Herbie coughed frightfully ; and no wonder, for the room was like an ice-house or a vault. I asked Arthur to come and skate, but he wouldn’t ; and then he was just going to say something to tell you, when in marched Mrs. Dixon, and she was in such a rage, and said Arthur had no business to have people up-stairs, but she

should be happy to see Master Leslie if he would honour her in the drawing-room ; but Master Leslie had no notion of that, so he took up his hat and wished them good-bye. I do pity those two poor fellows."

"Ernest, I've got a thought ; shall we ask papa to have them here to spend Christmas?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"Well, I'll talk to him about it."

"And we are to call that queer old man Uncle Ambrose,—oh, here he comes!"

That day, just after dinner, when the whole party had gathered round the fire to eat their dessert, a note was brought to Ernest.

"From Squire Baldwin, sir," said the servant, giving it to him, "and a pair of rabbits, with his compliments, to Miss Constance."

"O Connie, what fun ! just think, £5 from the old screw,—papa, may we go to Willingham and get some things ? You must settle what is to be done with it, papa."

And then there followed a long discussion, during which it was settled that half the money should be devoted to giving beef to all the most aged people in the village, and out of the other half, Jamie White was to have a pair of warm blankets, old Stephen a comfortable coat of rough cloth, and his wife and old Nanny Green warm shawls to keep off rheumatism.

Mr. Barnett listened in silence, but he seemed to watch with pleasure the animated faces of the children as they arranged these schemes for the welfare of their poor neighbours. At length he said,—

“And, pray, may I know what all these grand preparations are for?”

“For Christmas, to be sure,” said Ernest.

“We want this to be a time for showing ‘good-will’ to our friends,” said Mr. Leslie.

“Yes, yes, yes; to be sure. Well, children, I think old Uncle Ambrose will come with you to the town to-morrow.”

And so it was arranged.

Reginald soon found an opportunity of asking his father about the two boys, and Mr. Leslie gladly consented and wrote a note to Mrs. Dixon that evening, having first consulted Dr. Stephens as to the safety of moving Herbie, and ascertaining from him that, if the child was well wrapped up and carried quickly into a close carriage, he would be less likely to get harm than by remaining in that damp house. Just before tea Ernest and Constance came into the room where Mr. Barnett was sitting alone. He called them to him, and said,—

“Well, children, I want to contribute something to all this merriment,—what shall I do for you?”

The children looked at each other and hesitated.

“What do you want most to be done for you?”

“O sir,” said Constance eagerly, “there is one thing Ernest and I want very much.”

“Well, what is it?”

"I'm afraid it's asking too much, sir."

"No; I'll do anything for you up to a five-pound note."

"Oh, that is capital!" cried Ernest.

"Well, sir," said Constance; "there's a lady here who comes every morning to teach me, and she lives at the corner of the village street, and she's got a brother who is clerk in a bank at M——, and she wants him home for Christmas, but he can't afford to come because they are very poor. So it would be so nice to send him the money to come home, wouldn't it?"

The old man's eyes glistened. "Yes, and you are a good child to think of it; so here is five pounds, and you shall sit down and write to him now, and send it."

So Constance wrote on a sheet of paper, "Please come home to your sister for Christmas," and put the five pounds into it, and then Mr. Barnett directed it.

"I say, Connie, this is fun," said Ernest.





THE FIVE-POUND NOTE.

“It is ; isn’t it ? Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Barnett.”

“You must do something for me in return, little maiden.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Let me hear you call me Uncle Ambrose.”

“Then, thank you, Uncle Ambrose,” said Connie.

“Bless you, my child !” and the old man’s

head was turned away, for it was long, long since any one had used that name to him.

“My children,” said Mr. Leslie, entering the room at this moment ; “here is a disappointment. Mrs. Dixon won’t let the little Forrester boys come ; a most decided refusal has just arrived.”

“O papa ! what a shame ! what a cruel shame !”

“I don’t think it is kind, certainly,” said Mrs. Leslie, who was standing by ; “but it is tea-time. Where is Mr. Barnett ?” For he had suddenly left the room.

It was not long before he joined them again, but there was a cloud on his face ; it wore an anxious and troubled look, and Mr. Leslie remarked that he feared the children’s mirth was too much for him.

“No, no, my friend, it is not that,” said the old gentlemen ; “but I am thinking of all the Christmas times I have wasted, when I might have been making others happy as your dear children are doing.”



## CHAPTER X.

### "GLAD TIDINGS."

"Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies,  
With the angelic host proclaim,  
Christ is born in Bethlehem.  
Hark ! the herald angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King."



CHRISTMAS EVE had come. The shadows of night were gathering in fast, the stars were coming out one by one in the clear frosty sky, and the moon was shining calmly down on the glistening white snow which covered the world beneath.

Arthur and Herbert were sitting close together over their little fire ; Christmas Eve brought no joy and merriment to them,

nothing but the thought of coming sorrow and the remembrance of past joy which could never come again.

"Arthur, it's only four days more that I am to have you?" said Herbie.

"It's only two, Herbie," whispered Arthur, "for I am to go to London on the 27th."

"O Arthur, Arthur! how shall I bear it? I cannot, cannot!" and Herbie's voice was choked with sobs.

"Hush, Herbie! don't let us have tears this last Christmas Eve that we shall have each other perhaps."

"Arthur, I've been thinking, do you know, of the song the angels sang on Christmas Eve long ago; it seems to ring in my ears, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.' I suppose papa is praising, too, this Christmas—I like to think of that."

"Yes."

"I wish, oh, I do wish I was there too. I wonder, Arthur, if by next Christmas Eve

I shall be singing 'Glory to God in the highest' with papa and mamma. I think one could praise Him so much better if one was not weak, and ill, and cold."

"O Herbie, don't talk like that, I hate to hear you."

"Well, I won't;" but the little boy's eyes wandered wistfully towards the window, and as he watched the stars coming out one by one, he thought of the shepherds of Bethlehem and the glad chorus of the angels.

"Arthur," he said at length, "Christmas is a time of 'glad tidings.' I wish some would come to us."

"What's the good of wishing, Herbie? nothing *can* come, unless I were to be taken ill and stopped going to sea. And I'm afraid there's not much chance of that."

"Do you remember last Christmas Eve, Arthur? Oh, I wonder if papa knows how sad we are to-night."

"No one can know," said Arthur, brushing his hand hastily across his cheek.

"Yes, Arthur, God knows," said little Herbie.

At this moment old Simon came into the room.

"Well, my little lads," he said, while his old face could be seen in the moonlight beaming joyously,—“well, here’s as good fortune as a fairy tale; I reckon it be more like a fairy tale than anything else. If here isn’t a carriage at the door, and Mrs. Dixon says quite humble like, ‘Simon, go up and tell the young gentlemen they’re to go to the rectory instantly, and carry Master Herbie down, and wrap him up well.’”

“Simon, what *do* you mean? you’re joking!” cried Arthur, springing to his feet. “How can it be?”

“I don’t know, but so it be,” said the old man; “and you’re to get yourselves ready as quick as you can; put on all your best.”

It was not long before Arthur and Herbie were ready; and Simon, taking the little sick boy in his arms, wrapped him completely in

a blanket and carried him down-stairs. Mrs. Dixon met them in the hall; she seemed very much confused,—

"My dear boys," she said hurriedly, "events have turned out strangely, you are going to the rectory to spend Christmas. I hope Herbie will not suffer, but the doctor has given leave. I need not remind you, I am sure, that it is your duty to speak gratefully of all the benefits and kindness shown towards you; nothing is so hateful in young people as ingratitude."

Arthur's lip curled with scorn he could not control; and Mr. Dixon said, as he shook hands with him, "I hope you will always say we have been kind to you, and endeavoured to do our duty by you."

Then Arthur jumped into the carriage like one in a dream, and they were soon at the rectory. Mrs. Leslie met them at the door with a warm, kind welcome, and kissed Herbie's pale cheek; then she led them into the dining-room, where the whole family

were assembled at tea. Every one spoke kindly to the stranger boys, and Herbie was installed in a large arm-chair by the fire; but their arrival was evidently a great puzzle to Ernest and Constance, till a whisper from their father seemed to satisfy them.

When tea was over, Ernest took Arthur and Herbie up to Reginald's room, and on the way he said to them, "There is some secret about your coming here, but we are to know it to-morrow. We've had such fun to-day; we've been to Willingham with Mr. Barnett, and he's got such lots of things; and we've been round the village giving Christmas wishes, and pretty substantial ones too, and we've been putting up the holly in the church, and this evening we are going to decorate our own rooms, and you must help."

It *was* a merry Christmas Eve. Herbie seemed so much better that he was allowed to sit up and make some of the holly wreaths



under Constance's instructions ; and though both the boys worked in a maze of wonder, it was a very happy one, for this Christmas Eve had brought "peace and good-will" to



MAKING HOLLY WREATHS.

them ; and when they went to bed, Arthur said, "Herbie, isn't it all strange?"

"Yes, Arthur, I think it is something just come to cheer us up before you go."

"It will make it all the harder to go,

Herbie, boy. Oh, listen ; there are the Christmas waits."

And they listened eagerly while the sweet notes of the Christmas carol fell upon their ears,—

"Glory, glory, now we sing,  
Glory to our Infant King;  
Jesus, Prince of Peace, to Thee  
Glory evermore shall be !  
Though in glory Thou dost live,  
Thou wilt take what we can give.

"Christ has come to give us peace,  
Pardoned sinners to release ;  
Christ has come to cleanse from sin,  
Heaven's eternal joy to win.  
Happy Christmas ! thou dost bring  
Joyful news, for us to sing.

"Lord, our praise is weak and poor ;  
Oh, that we could praise Thee more !  
But Thine ear will not despise  
Songs from gladsome hearts that rise—  
Hearts that love Thee for Thy love,  
Hearts that long to sing above.

"Glory, for Thy lowly birth ;  
Glory, for Thy work on earth ;  
Glory, for Thy life-blood given ;  
Glory, for the hope of heaven ;  
Glory, for Thy wondrous love ;  
Glory be to Thee above !"

And while they listened sleep came over their weary eyes, and Herbie was soon lost in dreams of the night at Bethlehem long ago, when the glad tidings were brought to the shepherds who watched by their flocks; and the little boy fancied that he was amongst them, and that in the joyful song which came from the heavenly host he could distinguish the voices of his father and mother, and that they seemed to look lovingly down upon him and Arthur as they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men."

But there was joy in other homes as well as in the rectory on that merry Christmas Eve.

Miss Matheson sat alone by her fire, her brother's picture was open by her side, and tears were falling upon it, though she was struggling very hard to keep back the regrets which crowded into her heart, and to think only of the *real* joy which Christmas could bring to the most lonely and

sorrowful. For *her* the Saviour had deigned to come down to earth ; for *her* there was peace with God ; for *her* there was a home purchased by the death of her Lord,—

"Where grief, and disappointment, and fear could never come ;"

and she felt that while she could think on these things she ought not to murmur or sorrow, but rather join her heart and voice in the glad song of thankful praise which should rise from the world on Christmas Eve.

Presently her landlady came in, bearing a large covered basket.

"If you please, Miss Matheson, this has come from Willingham for you."

"What is it, Mrs. Burton ?"

"Well, miss, I don't know rightly, but it's heavy enough. Why, here be a pair o' fowl, a tongue, mince-pies, two bottles of wine, and groceries."

"It can't be for me, Mrs. Burton."

"Yes, miss, yes, plain enough,—Miss Matheson, at Mrs. Burton's."

"But I have no use for them," said Miss Matheson, sadly.

"Maybe you'll find some," said the landlady, smiling; "anyway, will you have the chickens boiled or roasted?"

And when this was decided, the good woman bustled away.

"It seems almost a mockery of my loneliness," said the governess sadly to herself, "and yet it is very, very kind; I must not be ungrateful; but oh, if only Willie were here!"


Could it be a dream, or was it a true and joyful reality a moment after, when a sound behind her made her look round and she saw Willie himself standing in the doorway? She could hardly believe it, but, nevertheless, it *was* Willie's voice that sounded in her ears, it *was* Willie's kiss that was on her cheek, and Christmas joy had come to Kate Matheson's lonely heart.



## CHAPTER XI.

### CHRISTMAS DAY.

"Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,  
Born this happy morning ;  
Jesu, to Thee be glory given."

 **OW** bright and clearly it dawned over the village of Enmore ; how joyfully the bells from the church rang out in the clear frosty air ; how cheerful were the greetings which were exchanged in the different homes, and nowhere were they more so than in the rectory.

A merry party were assembled round the breakfast-table, and everything seemed gleaming with Christmas sunshine.

It was arranged that the presents were to

be given in Reginald's room afterwards; and when breakfast was over, Ernest and Constance were there before any one else, for they were longing to claim his promise of telling them his "Golden Secret."

"Now, Reggie, we are all anxiety," said Connie.

"I don't care so much about it," said Ernest; "I think we are having a first-rate Christmas, and I don't believe Reggie's secret could make it better."

"I have a very shrewd guess what it is," said Connie.

"Perhaps it will only disappoint you both," said Reggie.

"No! I'm sure it won't, because I think I know it too," cried Ernest; and then Reginald gave a note to each of them.

They eagerly broke the seal, and drew out a sheet of paper. On Connie's was written, "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." And on Ernest's, "Let every



THE GOLDEN SECRET.

one of us please his neighbour for his good,  
.....for even Christ pleased not Himself. ”



The children folded up their papers with quiet, sober satisfaction.

"Is it not the true secret of a happy Christmas?" asked Reginald.

And a hearty "Yes" broke from them both.

"I knew you would find it so, and it will ensure a happy New Year as well, if you will remember it," he said gravely; and Ernest and Constance promised not to forget his happy Golden Secret.

By this time their father and mother, Arthur and Herbie, Mr. Barnett, and all the children were assembled, and the distribution of presents began. It would take too long to describe them, but we may rest content with knowing that every one had exactly what they wanted; and Arthur and Herbie were not forgotten, for Arthur had a complete set of materials for painting, and Herbie a beautiful Bible.

"Arthur, come and look here," said Reggie, who was looking with great pleasure at the picture Ernest had given him.

Arthur went to his side.

"Isn't this beautiful?"

"It's pretty good," said Arthur hesitatingly, whilst a crimson colour dyed his cheeks.

"It's a capital picture," said Mr. Barnett, looking closely at it. "Who is the artist?"

"I don't know," said Ernest; "I bought it; there are initials in the corner, A. E. F."

"It is mine. Arthur Egerton Forrester is what those initials stand for," said Arthur suddenly, in a firm voice. "I don't see why I need be ashamed to let you know that I tried to get money that way."

A hand was laid heavily on his shoulder. "So you want to be an artist, do you?" said Mr. Barnett, looking keenly into his face.

"I would do anything, sir, that would—that would keep me from going to sea," and Arthur covered his face with his hands.

"Going to sea?"

"Yes, sir; my aunt says I am to go on the

29th, and I can't bear it. I want to learn ; I want to read hard ; I don't want to go to sea—and I *can't* leave Herbie."

"Yes, yes, yes ; to be sure," said the old gentleman in a husky voice, as he turned away to the window.

Then the bells began to peal for church, and Herbie remained with Reginald, while all the rest went ; and Ernest and Constance came home with plenty to tell Reggie, about the kindly greetings they had received, and Miss Matheson's face of delight as she sat beside her brother, and Mr. Baldwin's look of contentment as he sat in his large pew surrounded by his little grandchildren, and papa's real Christmas sermon, which had had in it so much that Reginald had said to them that they could almost have fancied he had written it ; and how they had looked in to see Jamie White, and found him so delighted with the holly about his room, and they had given him a picture-book, and mamma was going to send him his Christmas dinner.

“And, Reggie,” said Constance, “we are to come up here directly after the little ones have gone to bed, and Mr. Barnett is to tell us a story, which he wants you to hear.”

The hours of Christmas Day sped on rapidly, and the hour for the late dinner arrived. The meal passed off with many merry jokes and playful laughs, and it was succeeded by a great game of romps—blind-man’s buff, puss in the corner, and a famous dish of snap-dragon for the little ones; and when they were safely in bed, the elders of the party adjourned to Reginald’s room, where they drew round the fire to hear Mr. Barnett’s story.

The old man seemed unusually agitated, and could hardly steady his voice sufficiently to commence, but at length he began,—

“There was once a man who lived a lonely and retired life—that is to say, he had no social enjoyments, no home delights; he loved nothing in the world but himself and his money. Well, this man, one Christ-

mas, became acquainted with his sister's son, a fine bright boy, I will not tell you his real name, we will call him Everard, and by his honest, truthful ways, his quick intellect, and his brightness, he crept into the heart of the money-loving man. Time went on, and the merchant said he would make Everard his heir if he would enter his mercantile house. And so it was arranged: but a change came to Everard, and when he became a man, he determined to spread the 'glad tidings' to those far away.

“His uncle was infuriated, and renounced him then and there, cast him out of his affections, and left his heart lonely and oppressed. Years passed on. Everard became a missionary; he married, and in those distant climes his health sank; his wife died on their homeward voyage, and he arrived in England with his children, a soldier worn out in the battle of life. Then his uncle should have come forward and helped him, but he did not, and shortly after

he, the merchant, sailed for the West Indies.

“On his return to England he heard that Everard was dead, and he was sent a letter which had been left for him, in which his nephew entreated him to befriend his orphan children. But the crust of coldness and severity had so hardened over the grasping merchant’s heart, that he believed himself still aggrieved by the man who was dead.

“And then the old man got a craving to see Everard’s children, and he came to the part of the country where they were, still saying to himself, I will have nothing to say to them.

“It was Christmas time,”—Mr. Barnett’s voice was almost choked with deep emotion,—“it was Christmas time, I say, and the merchant’s heart was melted; God’s softening power fell upon it, and put peace and good-will into it. He saw how wrong he had been, how the misery of his life had been brought on by his own sinful wish to

hold his nephew back from his Master's service, and he prayed for forgiveness. Then remorse filled his heart for his conduct to Everard, and he longed that Everard's children should be to him as sons, and fill the void in his lonely heart. This is my story, children; take warning from it, and avoid the old man's sin."

Then a joyful cry rose from two of the party, and Arthur and Herbie came to his side.

"You are our Uncle Ambrose, whom papa taught us to love, and to pray for every day, and he was your Everard."

And the old man drew them into his arms and wept tears of joy.

"Then this is the secret of their being here," said Ernest joyfully.

"Yes," said Uncle Ambrose, when he had regained composure; "I had a stormy interview with Mrs. Dixon yesterday, and finally produced your father's letter in which he entreated me to befriend you, and I see I



THE DISCOVERY.

have just come in time to save Arthur from going to sea. And now, my boys, will you



be the old man's children, will you cheer his lonely life?"

And they gladly answered "Yes."

"I cannot ask you to share my home, for I have not room for you; but I have made an arrangement to-day, which will, I hope, please you both. Mr. Leslie has consented that you, Herbert, shall remain as an inmate of his house, while Arthur continues to go to school with Ernest.

"And I shall have him in the holidays?" asked Herbie anxiously.

"Yes, yes, yes; to be sure," answered Uncle Ambrose; "and I am to come here once a year, and you are often to come to me."

"O Reggie, this is a merry Christmas," whispered Connie; "it is better than Treverton."

"It is, dear," said Reginald. "Let us thank God for it."

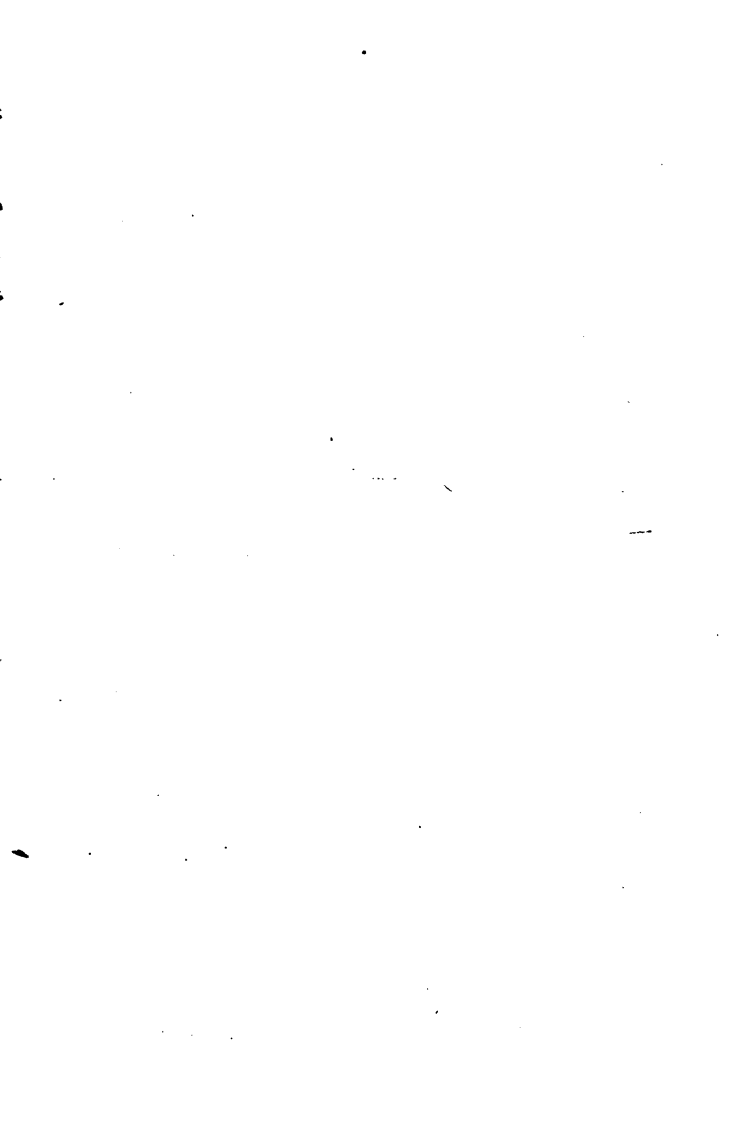
Bright days had dawned for the orphan

boys—brighter than they had dared to hope for, but brightness cannot last for ever, and it was soon to be clouded for them.

When the next Christmas came, the snow lay deeply over Herbie's grave, and the little boy's spirit had joined the heavenly host above.

Arthur was not left alone, however; he had found brothers in Reginald and Ernest: though his sorrow was deep, it was not despairing; he could think of Herbie taking part in the joyful song, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men,"—and he knew that for all his weakness, pain, weariness, and sorrow, Herbie now was "comforted."





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